

Read the following passages and answer the questions at the end of the packet (pages 25-27). Only the answer sheets (page 28) will be collected in September

Part I – A Way of Life and Love

A Portrait of Love

Imagine you had to choose three and only three images from the Gospels to describe who Jesus is. What would you choose, and why? Chances are, at least one of those images would be from the Paschal Mystery.

The **Paschal Mystery** is Christ's work of saving us from our sins - accomplished through his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

The term *mystery* in religious language refers to truths revealed to us by God.

"Great is the mystery of the faith!" the Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (part one) and it celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (part two), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God in the Father (part three).
~Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2258

The mystery of faith requires a response from us. Our response is to believe in the mystery of faith, celebrate it, and live from it in our relationship with the one true God. The *Catechism* calls this relationship prayer (see CCC, 2558).

The mystery of faith increases our knowledge of God. Faith in the mysteries of God's revelation gives us greater access to their meaning. Saint Anselm liked to put it this way: Believe so you can understand.

We call Christ's Death, burial, Resurrection, and Ascension a mystery because we can never fully understand it. The Paschal Mystery gives us an unending revelation of who God's is, who we are, and the goodness of Creation. It is like a pitcher that never runs out of water, no matter how many times you pour from it. It's life-giving and never ending.

The *Catechism* teaches that the Paschal Mystery is Jesus Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. It also lists Jesus' Crucifixion, burial and descent into Hell in the definition (see CCC, 512). The *Catechism* also refers to Christ's Passion, his life and Death, and Resurrection as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant (see CCC, 601). It explains that the various aspects of the Paschal Mystery are celebrated throughout out liturgical year (see CCC, 1171).



The idea of choosing three images as we did above is an actual method of artistic presentation that became popular in Christian art beginning in the Middle Ages. This presentation is called a *triptych* and simply contains a set of three paintings or sculptures. The three images are usually connected side by side, and the center panel is often wider than the others.

If we were to create our own triptych of Jesus' life, each of us would have our own idea about which images to choose.

Even if we agree that the first image would center on the birth of Jesus, the second his Crucifixion or Resurrection, and the third on the Ascension, we would still have to make more specific decisions.

For example, which picture from the Infancy Narrative would work for the first panel? Would it come from the accounts of the first Christmas in the Gospels according to Matthew or Luke? Maybe it could depict the Magi

bringing gifts to Jesus of gold, frankincense, and myrrh? Perhaps it would be a picture of angels speaking to shepherds in a field, or of shepherds visiting the baby Jesus, with his parents Mary and Joseph. Other possibilities might be a painting of the bright star over Bethlehem or one of Jesus in a manger, surrounded by barn animals and his parents.

The Paschal Mystery refers to the events of Jesus' life that prompt us to confess that he is the Christ. It is the reason for our faith in him as the Messiah. It is why we call him Son of God, and it is why we aren't satisfied focusing only on Jesus as a great moral teacher. Even if you were limited to three images, it would be hard to offer an artistic description of who Jesus is without touching on the Paschal Mystery.

All four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – contain the *Passion Narrative*, about the suffering and Death of Jesus, as well as the *Resurrection Narrative*. Two of the Gospels – Mark and Luke – and the Acts of the Apostles mention the Ascension of Jesus. "So the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

As the Gospels tell the story of the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus, we are presented with many images. Yet, no one image or even a set of three in a triptych can capture the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), a Spanish Carmelite sister, would understand why young people often have trouble developing a real spiritual life. It's sometimes easy to be distracted by other things in everyday life. Even Saint Teresa knew a time when she spent little energy in building her relationship with God. As a young and witty nun, Dona (Sister) Teresa really enjoyed fine things, delicious food, and lots of visitors at her convent.

Then one day in 1553, something new happened. Teresa saw an unfamiliar "statue" in the chapel. The bleeding, battered Jesus was there, lit by a flickering candle. At first, she turned away in disgust. Then, she was touched by a sudden and overwhelming realization. The suffering and love of Jesus was real. Jesus was real! She dropped to her knees and burst into tears. Remorse and love flooded into her heart.

From that day, Jesus was always real for Teresa. She spent time in prayer and got to know him more and more. She taught others to do the same. Teresa wrote three books on spirituality: *The Way of Perfection*, *Autobiography*, and *The interior Castle*. She was named a saint in 1622, forty years after her death. She gained the title of doctor of the Church in 1970. All people, Saint Teresa said, have a call to holiness – to be connected so closely with Jesus that he lives in them. This passage by Saint Teresa reminds us of the relationship we can have with Jesus.

However softly we speak, he is near enough to hear us. Neither is there any need for wings to go find him. All one need do is go into solitude and look at him within oneself... Since he does not force our will, he takes what we give him; but he does not give himself completely unless we give ourselves completely.

The Origins of the Word "Paschal"

The Greek and Latin word *Pasha* and the Hebrew word *Pesach* both mean "Passover." What is the link between Passover and the Paschal Mystery? The Book of Exodus tells the Passover story (see Exodus 11:1-12:50). You may recall it concerns the tenth plague, in which the first born of the Egyptians was to die. The Israelites were told to mark their doorposts and lintel with the blood of a lamb. The angel of death "passed over" the homes of the Israelites, "saving" them from death. Christians can easily see many parallels between the tenth plague from Exodus and the Passover of Jesus.

The Passover of Jesus occurred when he died as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29). Whereas the lamb's blood saved the Israelites from political slavery, Jesus' blood shed on the Cross saved all of humanity from sin and death. Through the saving action of his Death and Resurrection, death, in a sense, now "passes over" all of humanity. At funerals, for example, we say that when someone dies, life is not over; it is changed. Then seven weeks after Easter Sunday, Christ's Passover was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit poured out his grace on Pentecost (see CCC, 731). Jesus instituted the Eucharist at a Jewish Passover meal. Every time we gather at Mass to celebrate Jesus' Paschal Mystery, we remember the Last Supper and how Jesus died for us so that we might have eternal life. We celebrate that his saving work is made present in the liturgy.

Meaning of the Paschal Mystery

Knowing what the Paschal Mystery refers to is not the same as knowing what the Paschal Mystery means. It is faith that helps us understand its meaning. Faith, like reason, is a way of knowing. You can memorize the definition, but the meaning of the Paschal Mystery involves our Redemption, which is celebrated and made present in the Eucharist. This has meaning for your life, the life of the Church, and the life of all humanity.

Understanding and believing in the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus in a foundation of our faith. Saying Jesus saves basically means that, through God's action, from death come new life. Our salvation through Christ is from both sin and death. It is a mystery to us because as finite, or limited, beings, we cannot fully understand the infinite meaning of what Jesus has done for us. In faith, however, we are certain that this "from death to life" Redemption comes from Christ. For Christ's Resurrection is a promise for our resurrection.

While the Paschal Mystery specifically refers to Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, we see God's saving work all around us.

What about when you've gone through a difficult time? Think of that darkness, pain, or sadness that we all feel when we are in crisis as a "death." Perhaps the difficult time was actually due to the death of a loved one or when a family goes through a painful divorce, a discovery of abuse, a financial crisis, or a serious illness.

The pain and suffering one feels in the midst of a crisis is real. Yet, the Good News of our faith assures us that suffering and pain are not the end of the story. The reality of the Paschal Mystery gives us hope. As the Son of God overcame our pain and suffering into a new life. Although the painful situation itself may not have been a good thing, God's grace can make something good come from something painful.

Christ, who suffered the Passion and crucifixion, strengthens us in our own suffering. When we turn to him, in prayer and the Sacraments, and unite our suffering to his, it can become a means of purification and salvation.

Universal Call to Holiness

The Paschal Mystery has gained for us our Redemption. Through it we receive new life, new possibilities, and new hope. In our day-to-day lives through the Church and by the grace (see CCC, 824), we are called to holiness. But what does it mean to be holy? What comes to mind when you hear the word holiness?

Most of us use the adjective *holy* when we are referring to something sacred or divine. This definition suggests that something holy is worthy of devotion. While this definition is accurate, we miss the full meaning of *holy* if we don't realize how it could apply to ourselves. Holiness is from God, but it does not apply only to God and the saints. As Catholics, we know that holiness comes to us through the grace of our Baptism. Our Baptism calls us to holiness in each area of our lives, and we grow in holiness of life in and through the Church.

"The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church," the Vatican II document with the Latin title *Lumen Gentium*, makes clear that every member of the Church is called to holiness because it is God's desire. As Saint Paul says: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Our holiness comes from the work of the Holy Spirit. "It is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others," (*Lumen Gentium*, 39). We maintain our holiness through a life of prayer, through taking part in the Church's liturgies, and responding to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives.

Our call to holiness through our Baptism is a high calling. It is one that requires us to trust in Christ's wisdom and to live up to his divine expectations:

- "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).
- "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).
- "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

The sanctification we received at Baptism is something we have to hold onto in our lives and Saint Paul offers a plan.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other ... Above all, clothe yourself with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ~Colossians 3:12-14

As we become more united with Christ and his Paschal Mystery, we grow in holiness. This is a lifelong process. Growing in holiness is not something we could do on our own. We can only do this with a strong connection with God.

To be holy is not the same as being literally perfect. Holiness applies to our physical and spiritual well being. To be holy is to be connected with God. We are only complete – we are only holy – with a healthy spiritual connection to God. We need to take care of ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This requires proper rest, a good diet, intellectual stimulation, healthy habits, and the feeding and nourishing of our souls.

The reason we are called to be holy is because Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is holy: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45). God calls us to holiness because he wants us to live out our Catholic life wholeheartedly with enthusiasm, will, and commitment. This may sometimes seem impossible because our whole heart is divided by many distractions. God can sometimes be the last thing on our minds as we live out our daily lives.

As Catholics, we recognize our struggle to be perfect and holy is actually the struggle to stay focused on living the way God intended. Every Ash Wednesday we read the words of the Prophet Joel, who calls all believers to a life of holiness by repentance or conversion. “Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12). The season of Lent is a special time to examine our lives. It is a time to ask ourselves: are we giving our whole heart to Christ? Are we living in ways that are holy as God is holy?

The ashes placed on our foreheads remind us of our limited time on Earth and calls us to reflect on how we are living out our Catholic faith. Mary, Mother of God, through God's grace and her openness to it, was granted the perfection of holiness that we are working toward. We strive to avoid sin and increase our holiness, and we have Mary as a model (see CCC, 829).

The Ninevites acknowledged their sins and welcomed holiness. This reflects the Paschal Mystery, which we are called to embrace. Like the people of Nineveh in the story of Jonah, we must examine our lives, recognize our sins, express sorrow, and repent. Our conversion is met with God's loving forgiveness. The Holy Spirit first turns our hearts toward him. He gives us the strength to try again (see CCC, 1432). With God's grace, then, we turn away from sin and become faithful to the Paschal Mystery active in our lives. As our sinfulness dies and we follow our call to holiness, we encounter new life in Christ.

The season of Lent ends before the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, the beginning of the Easter Triduum. These celebrations in the Church are about what Jesus did for us and invite us to see the Paschal Mystery – the dying and rising – in our own lives.

Called to the Body of Christ

The call to be holy and the call to love are not simply individual matters. There is a universal call to holiness of life. We are called to be part of the Church, and it is through faith and our Baptism that we become members of the one Body, the Church, though made up of many individuals, is one Body, and that one Body, with Christ as the Head, is known as the “Body of Christ” alive in the world today. “The Church increases, grows, and develops through the holiness of her faithful” (CCC, 2045).

The Church is described as “light” in a world of darkness, doubt, and despair. Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:15). The Church is also described as “salt,” since it is meant to preserve a good example for the people of the world, just as salt preserves food. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13).

When someone is living our Catholic faith fully, they live as a disciple of Jesus. They serve as an example to others and a witness to Christ's life and teaching, representing well our Church (see CCC, 2044). Food without salt can go bad, and it is very difficult to get around in a dark room without light. Jesus said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

The Call to Love

The Bible is full of expressions of this love that is at the root of holiness. For example, 1 John 4:16 reads, "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." So not only we are called to be holy because God is holy, we are called to love because God is love.

Our English language is limited when it comes to the word love. We can say we love pizza, but what happens after we eat three slices? We usually have had enough of what we love. The love we have for our parents, our friends, or simply someone who needs our help, are all different kinds of love.

The New Testament was originally written in the Greek language, which uses three different words for love. *Agape* (ah-GAH-pay) is considered divine love, a self-giving love. Saint Paul wrote about this kind of love: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). The great hymn to love that we just read from First Corinthians is about this kind of love. It is an unconditional gift of oneself that is offered out of care and concern for another's well-being. Agape involves serving others or making a sacrifice for others. Jesus expressed this type of love when he said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:12-13).

Another word, *philia*, (FILL-e-ah) describes friendship and can refer to love between friends. *Eros* (air-ohs) refers to the passion of romantic love.

When Jesus calls us to *love one another*, it is significant to note that he uses agape and not philia. Jesus knows that we may not be able to be friends with everyone, but we can have agape for everyone to the extent that we are concerned for the well-being of our friends and family, as well as that of strangers and even our enemies. To love in this way means to will the good of another.

Another significant dimension of agape is that it is *unconditional*. We can be concerned for the well-being of another regardless of how we may feel about the person. In order to have philia for a person, you need to be friends with him or her. In order to have eros for a person, you need to be in a relationship with him or her. Eros – passionate, romantic love – is not the same thing as a one-sided infatuation.

Unfortunately, eros is tremendously misunderstood. It is the source of the word *erotic*, which has taken on a negative meaning often connected to adult entertainment or pornography rather than a healthy romantic love. Romantic and sexual love in its proper place and context, fully expressed within the marriage relationship, are sacred gifts that can lead to new life.

The three different words for love help us clarify what we mean when we speak of love. However, they are not exclusive categories. A married couple should have the romantic love of eros in addition to philia.

Holiness calls us to appreciate the meaning of the three forms of love and to live them out in a way that gives glory to God while serving our neighbor (see CCC, 2013), including the poor and marginalized. When we pray "Thy will be done" in the Lord's Prayer, we are praying to wholeheartedly devoted ourselves to giving glory to God and serving our neighbors by loving them. Saint Gregory of Nyssa said: "Christian perfection has but one limit, that of having none" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Mos.*: PG 44, 300D) (CCC, 2028).

Love of Enemies?

Part of Jesus' new commandment of love, and one of the most difficult things he gave us to do, is to love our enemies.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
~Matthew 5:43-44

What does this teaching mean? What does it mean to love our enemies? First, remember that Jesus is calling us to practice agape, which is concern for the well-being of others, regardless of how we may feel about them.

Wishing an adversary well, even when that person has been hurtful, can actually help the one who has been offended. Revenge and resentment can lead people to harmful, and sinful, actions. Instead, call upon God's forgiveness. When Jesus prayed from the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), he was showing that forgiveness and reconciliation are also parts of the Paschal Mystery.

It is truly a moment of hope when two enemies can forgive one another and become friends, or at least respect one another in a new way. An enemy does not have to be someone's best friend, but it is important to pray for one's adversaries so they may no longer be enemies.

At thirteen, author C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) shocked his family by becoming an atheist. As a small boy, he'd endured a terrifying time at a boarding school. Then, when he was ten, his mother dies. Many years later, as an English professor at Oxford in England, a need and love for God came gloriously back to life in him. He became one of the best-known modern Christian writers.

- *In 1949, Lewis began writing seven books to create a Christian fantasy for children.*
- *The Chronicles of Narnia have sold more than 100 million copies in forty-seven languages and have been adapted as feature films.*
- *They explore great Christian themes, repentance, death, and resurrection. In the stories, a noble king (Aslan) lovingly dies for others and breathes life back into a frozen, lifeless kingdom. Aslan is always present when the characters need him.*
- *Lewis' love for God grew over time. How have you experienced something similar in your relationship with God?*
- *If you've read or watched The Chronicles of Narnia, how does Aslan remind us of God?*

Made In the Image and Likeness of God

One of the most famous Scripture passages in the New Testament can be found in the Gospel of John: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God loved us so much that he sent his Son to us. Jesus taught us about who God the Father is and what he wants of us. Through the Paschal Mystery, Jesus showed us God's love for us. Christ continually shared his teachings during his whole life, especially through his willing acceptance of the total sacrifice he made on the Cross for the Redemption of us all (see CCC, 561). God loved us enough to let us see the consequences of our actions. Human pride, arrogance, and sinfulness led to the Crucifixion of Jesus. Yet, despite human sinfulness, in the Paschal Mystery, Christ triumphed over death.

In sending his son, and in the Paschal Mystery, God the Father reveals the deep and unique love he has for humanity. Think about it: God did not send his Son to any other of his Creation, but to us, because we are the ones who are made in God's image and likeness.

To be made in the image and likeness of God is to possess four abilities unique to humans: intelligence, love, freedom, and conscience.

- *Intelligence:* As being created in God's image and likeness, we first have the capacity to know and love him. We also are able to know truth about God and to affirm that the truth exists.
- *Love:* We are able to be loved and to give love.
- *Freedom:* We have freedom to choose what is good. This means choosing not necessarily what we want, but what we should. We could also choose evil, but that reduces our freedom.
- *Conscience:* When properly formed, our conscience helps us discern good from evil and truth from falsehood.

The Book of Genesis reveals that's God created man and woman in his divine image. This Scripture passage prompts sacredness of all life, and the quality, the sacredness of all life, and the equality of each and every person that come from being made in God's image.

Human dignity is the foundation for Catholic Social Teaching. Every person is to be treated with respect and dignity. Respect for human dignity means that every person is to have the basic necessities and the right to life, food, shelter, clothing, clean water, work and freedom.

Every society and government is to look out for the welfare of the poor, the orphan, and the widow. If the poor are not taken care of, there is something morally wrong with the society and government. A society or culture is not fulfilling its responsibilities when people suffer due to hunger, lack of health care, lack of work, and lack of love.

We were created in the image and likeness of God, yet we sin. Recall that our first parents, Adam and Eve, transmitted to their descendants a human nature wounded by their own first sin and so deprived us of the original holiness and justice of Creation. We call this deprivation Original Sin. In discussing Original Sin, Saint Thomas Aquinas speaks of its four wounds.

- *Ignorance*, meaning our difficulty in knowing the truth and a loss of confidence that truth can be known;
- *Malice*, in our minds that inclines us to think the worst about others;
- *Weakness*, in our will that makes it hard to choose the good;
- *Disorder*, in the passions and emotions causing us to lose control of ourselves.

God's response to the reality of Original Sin is ultimately the gift of the Paschal Mystery. Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension redeem us, save us, and restore us to life in God's grace. And as members of his Body, the Church, we are asked to use our lives to be his image in the world. We are to be his feet, eyes, hands, ears, and voice so that people can know God's love, learn Jesus' message of Good News, and see the importance of the Catholic faith in our lives and in our world. Our personal response to God's call is shown in our way of life, our contributions to better help in society, and our active involvement in the Church.

We are the summit of God's Creation, and we possess the gift of chastity through the saving grace of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. When we act out of love we become models of God's faithfulness and kindness. The virtue of chastity grows from these relationships. In doing so, we act as Jesus who called us his friends because he fully revealed everything the Father wanted us to know (see John 15:15). Friendship is good for all of us because it creates a "spiritual communion" (CCC, 2347).

Human dignity comes from God as we are made in his image and likeness. From the moment of our creation to the moment of our death, we must respect that dignity. From the moment of conception, we are endowed with a "special and immortal" soul. We are "destined for eternal beatitudes", a state of utter bliss (CCC, 1703). Equal in God's eyes, we are called to treat each other equally and respect the dignity of life, from the moment of conception until death. No matter age or ability, we provide for and protect human life, thus upholding the Fifth Commandment.

Blessed Miguel Pro, S.J. (1891-1927)

Over the centuries, thousands of Christian martyrs have borne witness to these words. Even today, in places like China, men and women offer their very lives in service to the Gospel. In the early twentieth century, some Catholics in Mexico were killed because of their faith.

"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." ~Matthew 10:39

Blessed Miguel Agustin Pro was one such martyr. He was born in Guadalupe, Mexico, in 1891. As a child, he loved practical jokes and pranks. His call to become a priest did not change his playful nature. During his time in the seminary one of his friends said that he knew two Miguels – the playful one and the prayerful one.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Mexican government closed churches and anti-Catholic sentiment increased. Miguel and other seminarians had to flee the country. He finished his studies at a seminary in Spain and then chose to return to Mexico. During the years he had been away, the government had passed strict

anti-Catholic laws. In many areas, priests were outlawed. To continue their ministry, they were forced into hiding. Father Miguel became one of these clandestine priests.

Assuming a variety of disguises, such as a beggar or a policeman, he would secretly conduct Baptisms and marriages and perform the Last Rites for the sick. Once, when a suspicious official was eyeing him, Miguel took the arm of a young woman, pretending to be her boyfriend. This threw the official off track since he assumed a priest would never be so friendly with a woman. Miguel managed to evade detection for nearly seven years, but then he and his brother were discovered and falsely accused of an assassination attempt on a public official. The government wanted to make an example of a priest, so they sentenced Miguel to death by firing squad.

Government leaders believed that pictures of the execution would serve to silence Catholics, so they had his death photographed and recorded. At his execution on November 23, 1927, Miguel blessed the soldiers and then prayed briefly. He refused the final offer of a blindfold, and holding a crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other, he extended his arms in the shape of the cross. As the order to shoot rang out, he cried "Viva Cristo Rey!" "Long live Christ the King."

Later, the government released the photos. Instead of silencing dissenters, they actually bolstered the desire for freedom of worship and encouraged rebellion.

At Miguel's beatification in 1988, Saint John Paul II said, "Neither suffering nor ... the exhausting ministerial activity, frequently carried out in difficult and dangerous circumstances, could stifle the radiating and contagious joy which he brought to his life for Christ and which nothing could take away."

Making a Pilgrimage

"The very word practice brings with it the idea of learning ... and any practice is awkward and difficult. But it is necessary to attain any kind of proficiency in the spiritual life".
~Dorothy Day

The spiritual practice of making a pilgrimage means journeying to a particular holy site or shrine. Making the pilgrimage reminds us that Jesus calls us to follow him just as he once called his Apostles.

"And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him."
(Matthew 4:19-22)

In Catholic history, the practice of making pilgrimages reached a high point during the Middle Ages. Medieval Catholics often walked – in groups – from their homes in Europe to the Holy Land. The pilgrims knew their journey would take years. They also knew that they might die on the way because of diseases, bandits, injuries and unpredictable weather. Nonetheless, they wanted to walk where Jesus had walked. They traveled simply and prayerfully and wore their entire pilgrim wardrobe: a broad-brimmed hat to protect against the sun and rain, a long belted tunic like Jesus wore, simple shoes, and a pilgrim's pouch slung across their shoulder.

Today, Catholics of all ages and from all over the world still journey to holy places. Many of the most popular shrines are dedicated to Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus. Ten million people travel to the Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine in Mexico City each year, for example. Six million go annually to the Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine in France, and five million pilgrims trek to Czestochowa in Poland to view the Black Madonna Shrine.

However, there are many ways to make a pilgrimage, which is simply a journey of prayer and faith. A pilgrimage doesn't have to take you thousands of miles away. It doesn't have to be expensive. A pilgrimage could mean a twenty-minute trip to a church or shrine across town. Being a pilgrim just means making your way to a change in heart or growth in faith.

Pilgrims are part of the sacramental life of the Church. The Catechism describes the Church, the Body of Christ, as on a pilgrimage to God's Kingdom. In that sense, we are all pilgrims as we grow in faith to someday be with God in Heaven.

For he created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them.
~Wisdom 1:14

You know God gave humans gifts of intellect and free will. God did not create us so that we had no choice but to respond to him. Humans can and, at times, do reject God. In fact, because of our wounded nature through Original Sin, we are prone to error and “inclined to evil” in exercising our freedom (see CCC, 1714). But human reason also gives us the natural curiosity, freedom, and desire to recognize the voice of God deep within our conscience “to do what is good and avoid what is evil” (CCC, 1706). We are made with the natural ability to recognize the voice of God.

Earlier, we discussed the invitation to “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Simply put, we find our perfection “in seeking and loving what is true and good” (CCC, 1704, 1711). The Holy Spirit and grace enable us to live out our holiness through how we love and treat one another. This is called the moral life. “Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person” (CCC, 1706).

The Body of Christ – the Church – relies on the baptized to continue her mission of bringing the Kingdom of God to Earth. “Christians contribute to *building up to Church* by the constancy of their convictions and their moral lives” (CCC, 2045). A *conviction* is a belief in something that we believe to be true and worth doing or believing. “Because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

The Paschal Mystery enables us to be convinced that Jesus is the Savior of the world, and that we are created in God’s image and likeness, called to be members of the Church as the living Body of Christ. We are able to believe that living a moral life, with help of God’s grace, will result in eternal life.

Essential of Catholic Spirituality

There can be no understanding of Catholic spirituality without a perception and experience of the Holy Spirit who has been present in the world from the very beginning and has remained with God’s People and his Church. The Holy Spirit guides us, strengthens us, and teaches us to pray for example, Scriptures, liturgy, personal prayer, and theology are the main supports for a sound spirituality.

A distinct spirituality can also arise at the point of convergence of liturgical and theological currents, bearing witness to the integration of the faith into a particular human environment and its history. The different schools of Christian spirituality share in the living tradition of prayer and are essential guides for the faithful. In their rich diversity they are refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit.
~CCC, 2684

The Holy Spirit helps us understand and apply God’s word proclaimed in the celebration of the Eucharist and the other Sacraments. How much this helps us depends on how open our hearts are to the Holy Spirit’s gift. Through the words, actions, and the symbols used in liturgical celebration, the Holy Spirit puts the ministers and all those gathered “into a living relationship with Christ” (CCC, 1101). We encounter Christ and are strengthened to live out what we hear, what we celebrate, and what we do at Mass.

In the celebration of the liturgy, Sacred Scripture is extremely important. From it come the lessons that are read and explained in the homily and the psalms that are sung. It is from the Scriptures that the prayers, collects, and hymns draw their inspiration and their focus, and that actions and signs derive their meaning.
~CCC, 1100

Catholic spirituality involves trying to love Jesus, accepting his teaching, and living as his disciple. This is possible through the Cross of Christ, his sacrifice as the one mediator between God and man. Through the Cross, Jesus united himself to all of us. The possibility of entering into Christ’s Paschal Mystery is offered to each one of us. Christ suffered for and with us, giving us an example of what we should do. We make a commitment to Jesus to follow him.

DIMENSIONS OF FAITH	
Vertical Direction	Our relationship with God begins at the moment of existence. From every beginning of our lives, God calls to himself. We respond to God's desire to know us. We are open to God's presence and revelation, and we seek God's grace in the Sacraments. This dimension of spirituality grows when a person invests in his or her prayer life, seeks to know God, recognizes God's presence in daily life, or tries to figure out God's will for her or his life.
Horizontal Direction	A person's faith guides the way she or he treats others. People with strong horizontal spirituality live out their faith by teaching others with love and compassion. They keep God's Commandments, grow in the virtues, and model Christ to others.

Two Directions of Spirituality

Spirituality for Catholics is not a vague concept. Our spirituality is the practice of the faith, when we put out faith and talents at the service of God and his Kingdom.

One way to understand spirituality is to describe the practice of our faith as having two directions.

For some people, one of these directions might be stronger than another. But both are critical for us. A noble goal would be to evaluate both directions and try to grow the less developed one.

Two mysteries shape our spirituality as Catholics and our relationship with God.

- Our belief and relationship with the Triune God, as expressed in our creeds. We believe in God as three divine Person in one God; they are inseparable in what they are and what they do. Each divine Person, however, proclaims what is proper to him as a member of the Trinity. This is especially true in the Son's taking on human nature and in the gift of the Holy Spirit (see CCC, 267). When it comes to Creation, the work is attributed to God the Father, but it is also true that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "are the one, indivisible principle of creation" (CCC, 316).

The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith." The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Son, and the Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men "and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin." ~CCC, 234

- *The Paschal Mystery of Christ's Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension forms a Catholic faith that helps us deal with life's pain and losses with an assurance that our God knows what we experience, and he will help us get through it. Paschal Mystery spirituality accepts that hardships will come, but that through faithfulness and trust in God, hardships can become opportunities for the joy of new life, and ultimately the eternal happiness for which God made us.*

Obstacles to Spirituality

No material item can compete with the gift of wisdom and the other gifts of the Holy Spirit. It should come as no surprise that what often takes wisdom away from people, or distracts people from the wisdom of God, is the focus on material riches. The misguided focus is one of the reasons Jesus said it is so hard for the rich to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

What are the riches and material things can keep a person from the Kingdom of God? It's not that money and material things are bad in and of themselves; rather, the problem arises when our focus on material wealth takes precedence over our relationship with God. At that point we not only struggle with spiritual poverty, but we've also broken the First Commandment: "I 'am the Lord your God,... you shall have no other gods before me" (Deuteronomy 5:7).

On the other hand, asking for and being open to the wisdom and spirit of God can bring someone great wealth, be it material or spiritual. King Solomon asked for wisdom and God also gave him great wealth. Later, Solomon became distracted by his many wives and suffered God's disfavor (1 King 11:1-13).

God created us with a natural sense of longing. Our yearning and longing is a hunger and thirst for something more in life that can only be properly fulfilled by God. When we try to fulfill this longing with material things, products or procedures, athletic achievements, or substance abuse, we end up suffering from *spiritual poverty*, which refers to an absence of God in our lives.

The vice and evil of spiritual poverty is a direct result of failing to achieve the virtue and goodness of "poverty of spirit." Through these concepts sound similar, they are direct opposite. To have poverty of spirit means to empty ourselves and to get rid of sins such as materialism, greed, lust, addiction, indifference, and self-pity. When we allow God's grace to banish these things from our lives, we realize that it is God we are really longing for. It's then that the Holy Spirit can fill us with abundant love, joy, peace, healing, gratitude, and eternal life.

For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?

~ Matthew 16:26

Many people love and remember Blessed Mother Teresa for her work among the poor of Calcutta, India. The Missionaries of Charity order she founded reaches around the world. Mother Teresa often told the story of the train ride on which she describes her call to establish an order of religious sisters. On October 7, 1950, four years after she felt that call, the Missionaries of Charity were founded as a religious institute of the Archdiocese of Calcutta. Mother Teresa also founded a branch of religious brothers in Calcutta in 1963, a contemplative branch of sisters in New York in 1976, and a group of contemplative brothers in Rome in 1979. Lay people also joined Mother Teresa in serving the poor, and in 1969 the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa were officially established. Then in 1984, the Lay Missionaries of Charity were established. Today, there are more than 4,000 Sisters of Charity working in more than 130 countries.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta took care of the poorest people in India but often spoke of the great spiritual poverty found in the richest countries of the world. Anyone can succumb to spiritual poverty, but it is often found in those who seem to have everything. People can still feel depressed even if they have all the material comforts they want: a credit card with no limits, a sport car, the latest phone or computer, or other technological gadgets.

The horizontal dimension of spirituality affirms the goodness of our relationships with friends and family. God is pleased with our relationships when our friends and family help us become better people, strengthen and affirm our moral decision-making, and encourage us to grow – and when we do the same for them. However, a problem can arise when a person chooses one of these relationships over his or her relationship with God. This is evident when what seems cool or more fun conflicts with the will of God, or when one's family encourages practices that are degrading to human dignity.

One important way to gauge how well we live out the fullness of the Christian life is how we love one another, especially family members. Unfortunately, many families experience division and disagreements, and need reconciliation and forgiveness, death, separation, and divorce sometimes play roles in dividing families. Under such conditions one needs to possess spirituality strengthened by God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. One should never take his or her family or friends for granted.

Jesus explains the conditions for discipleship: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37-39).

Essential Elements of Spirituality

We have been given direction from God and the Church on how to be holy and spiritual. We have guidance on how to be holy, namely the Beatitudes and teachings from the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments as well as the Great Commandment to love one another. These direct and build our holiness; our spirituality. We also grow in holiness by practicing the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity as well as the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. These all come from God to help us lead holy and spiritual lives.

Reflection, self-examination, and introspection are all essential elements of our spirituality. It is about taking time to really think about our lives and being honest with ourselves before God. When we do so, we have the opportunity to encounter our conscience in daily decisions. A fully formed conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit, can be like a messenger of Christ's will into our lives (see CCC, 1778).

Return to your conscience, question it ... Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness.

~ Saint Augustine, CCC 1779

We must accept and live the grace of Redemption. As we grow spiritually, we help build up the Church with our firmly held faith and good, upstanding lives. "The Church increases, grows, and develops through the holiness of her faithful" (CCC, 2045). All of us can reach a unity of faith and eventually to attain the fullness of Christ.

The greatest figures in Christian theology affirm these essential elements of spirituality. Saint Augustine's book *The Confessions* deliberately recalls events in his life when he recognized the mysterious actions of God's grace. Our lives become conversations with God when we work on spirituality and holiness.

Another example of Catholic spirituality includes the *Spiritual Exercise* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola are based on reflection and meditation on Sacred Scripture. The exercise encourages self-examination at three different times of each day: upon rising, after the noon meal, and after the evening meal. The exercises are usually performed in one of these ways: extended over thirty days in a silent retreat away from home; as a weekend or eight-day retreat; or as part of daily life at home, over several months.

Our spirituality can be strengthened by learning from our parents, family, and the "text" or context of our daily lives. Our families, no matter how imperfect, have a strong influence on the formation of our spirituality. The Paschal Mystery reminds us that the power of Christ will show us the way to truth. He will teach us, keep us, and help us through family pain, disagreements, and all the other experiences that come along with the messiness of life.

We can increase our spirituality more formally through organized religious education and worship. Religious education teaches someone about particular religion, be it Christian, Jewish, and/or Muslim, and it also teaches how to live out the practices of the religion. Formal religious education for Catholics take place in parish catechetical programs for children, families, and adults of all ages as well as in Catholic school religion classes.

Our spirituality gives us strength to face everyday life. The liturgy and especially the Sacraments are keys to our spirituality as Christians. In his 1995 encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life), Saint John Paul II made the connection between our spiritual lives and the Paschal Mystery.

The Sacraments make us sharers in divine life, and provide the spiritual strength necessary to experience life, suffering and death in their fullest meaning. Thanks to a genuine rediscovery and a better appreciation of the significance of these rites, our liturgical celebrations, especially celebrations of the Sacraments, will be ever more capable of expressing the full truth about birth, life, suffering and death, and will help us to live these moments as a participation in the Paschal Mystery of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

*~Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae,
paragraph 84*

****answer questions on pages 25-27**

Part II – Why Study the Church

God's Will to Save

- *How are our lives changed by being members of the Catholic Church?*
- *What is the Catholic Church's purpose?*
- *What role does the Church play in God's divine plan?*

The Bible says that during the Great Flood it rained for forty days and forty nights, which is another way of saying that it was no ordinary storm. This cataclysmic flooding impacted every known city and region. The natural order of things were ripped apart.

*"The Lord saw the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth ... But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord."
~Genesis 6:5, 8*

Noah stood out in the midst of it all. The society around him had given in to greed, violence, immortality, and other corruptions of the heart. God was grieved by them. But Noah was different. He walked with God (see Genesis 6:10). He listened. He obeyed God's commands. Because this, God chose to preserve him and his family from the Great Flood.

God told Noah to build an ark. After the vessel was built, God instructed Noah to bring his family and two of all living creatures on board. But we know the story of the Great Flood is not about the animals. It's about sin and the catastrophic consequences – and it's about God's will to save the faithful few who walked with him.

The ark can be seen as a symbol of the *Catholic Church*. The ark saved Noah from the waters of the flood as we can be saved through the Church and the grace of Baptism.

*"About Jesus Christ and the Church, I simply know they are just one thing, and we shouldn't complicate the matter."
~Saint Joan of Arc*

God made Noah the *steward* of Creation so that the world be saved. Noah's ark is one of Old Testament images that prefigured Christ's Church. The mission of the Catholic Church, God continues his plan of salvation for all humanity.

The Catholic Church was instated by Jesus Christ. She is the assembly of believers, founded by Jesus Christ and organized as a community. The Church is called by God the Father to acknowledge – under the guidance and graces of the Holy Spirit – that Jesus is Lord. Through Word, Sacrament, and service, the Catholic Church continues Jesus' mission and ministry of proclaiming the Kingdom of God for the salvation of all people. The Catholic of Christ subsists fully in the Catholic Church, under the guidance and governance of the Pope and *Magisterium*. The Church is the assembly of those called by God from "the ends of the earth" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 751*). The Catholic Church is what God willed to unite all people.

The biblical story of Noah conveys truth about sin and salvation. The account of Noah's ark prefigures the salvation that comes through the Sacrament of Baptism (*see CCC, 1219*). Baptism gives us a share in God's redemptive grace, but it does not simply save us. The Sacrament removes Original Sin and personal sins as well as begins and calls us to a life of holiness.

The account reveals that God wants humans to flourish by living as he created us – in goodness, holiness, and justice. The corruption of people through their sins "grieved (God) to his heart" (*Genesis 6:6*). The flood may seem to be the big disaster in the story, but sin itself is the disaster. Through water, however, God carries out his plan of salvation to bring about "an end to vice and a beginning of virtue" (*Roman Missal, Easter Vigil 42*).

God's judgment falls on the world by means of the flood. But hope remains for those who trust and obey God. Hope remains for those who walk with God. It is those that walk with God who become the stewards of his creation.

Through Noah, God starts life on Earth all over again. The descendants of Noah are presented in the Bible as the forbears of the nations of the Earth. Through God's *covenant* with Noah, the sign of which is the rainbow, God promises never again to destroy the Earth and its inhabitants with water. This covenant will remain in force as long as the world lasts.

"From the very beginning God blessed all living beings, especially man and woman. The covenant with Noah and with all living things renewed this blessing of fruitfulness despite man's sin which had brought a curse on the ground."
~CCC, 1080

The Catholic Church is a community that continues Christ's mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God in the world. In order to do this, we must allow God to work with and through us. Saint Paul is a great example. Pope Benedict XVI noted that Paul always pointed to his relationship with the Lord as the source of the work he did. Instead of touting his strengths or successes, Paul frequently said it was God who was doing the work through him. When Paul prayed that an unspecified "thorn" be removed from him, he got this answer from Jesus: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (*Corinthians 12:9*). Here are some additional thoughts from Pope Benedict XVI's general audience June 13, 2012:

What is this "thorn" in the flesh? We do not know and he does not tell us but his attitude enables us to realize that every difficulty in following Christ and witnessing to his Gospel may be overcome by opening oneself with trust to the Lord's action. St. Paul is well aware that he is an "unworthy servant" (Lk 17:10) – it is not he who has done great things, it is the Lord – an "earthen vessel" (2 Cor 4:7), in God places the riches and power of his Grace. In this moment of concentrated contemplative prayer, St. Paul understands clearly how to face and how to live every event, especially suffering, difficulty and persecution. The power of God, who does not abandon us or leave us on our own but becomes our support and strength, is revealed at the very moment when we experience our own weakness...

Dear friends, in the past century Albert Schweitzer, a Protestant theologian who won the Nobel Peace Prize, said "Paul is a mystic and nothing but a mystic, that is, a man truly in love with Christ and so united to him that he could say: Christ lives in me. The mysticism of St. Paul is not only founded on the exceptional events he lived through, but also his daily and intense relationship with the Lord who always sustained him his Grace.

Mysticism did not distance him from reality; on the contrary it gave him the strength to live each day for Christ and to build the Church to the ends of the world of that time. Union with God does not distance us from the world but gives us the strength to remain really in the world, to do what must be done in the world.

Blessed Pius IX (1792-1878)

How does the Holy Spirit continue to guide the Catholic Church? One way is through gatherings of the leadership of the Church, called Church councils, to address issues and concerns that face the Church at any given point in history. In the past 2,000 years, there have been twenty-one councils. Many people know about Vatican II, but fewer realize it got its name because it was the second such Church council. Nearly one hundred years before, Blessed Pope Pius IX convened Vatican I.

The fourth son of Giralmo Masti-Ferretti and the countess Caterina Solazzi, Blessed Pope Pius XI is the longest reigning Pope in history. He ruled for nearly thirty-two years, from 1846 to 1878. (Blessed Pope John Paul II is the second longest ruling pope, governing for twenty-six years.) because Pius was the first photographed Pope as well as the first pontiff to live in a time of worldwide communication, he became the face of the Church.

The First Vatican Council clarified the Catholic teaching concerning the Church of Christ. During this council, the doctrine of papal infallibility was clearly articulated and accepted as a matter of faith for the entire Church. This represented a major clarification of doctrine as well as a more complete understanding of the role of the Pope in the world. In addition, Pope Pius proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary as infallible in addition to promoting worldwide devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Pope Pius IX promoted the inner life of the Church. His dedication and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary led to the recognition, not just of the dogma of Immaculate Conception, but also to the Feast of the Assumption, a Marian dogma that was infallible declared in 1950. Devotion to Mary has increased over the past hundred years.

Pope Pius' love for the Catholic Church was paramount. Pius saw the Church clearly as the Body of Christ made manifest in the world and staunchly defended the Church and her rights. In fact, his last words were, "Guard the church I loved so well and sacredly." Blessed Pope John Paul II beatified Pope Pius on September 30, 2000.

Interpreting Noah

The early Church of the New Testament saw the prefiguring of the Church and God's salvation through Baptism in the Old Testament account of the Great Flood. The First Letter of Saint Peter compares the flood to Baptism.

"God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is eight persons, were saved through water. And Baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you – not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ... ~1 Peter 3:20-21

Noah and his family were saved by being carried in the ark through the waters of the flood so that the world might begin anew. In a parallel way, as we mentioned, the Christian passes through the waters of Baptism so that he or she may, through the Church, renew the world by proclaiming the Good News. People who are baptized have their sins forgiven, and they are regenerated in their relationships with God. They have been given a new beginning in the life and work of Christ. Still those initiated into the Church retain the weakness of our human nature and our tendency to sin, which we call concupiscence. These things remain in us so that we may prove ourselves with the grace of Christ (see CCC, 1426).

Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine compared the Church to the family of Noah, whom God protected and brought to safety. "The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation. The Church is "the world reconciled." She is the bark which "in full sail of the Lord's Cross, by the breath of the Holy Spirit, navigates safely in this world," (CCC, 845). She is prefigured by Noah's ark, which alone saves Noah's family the flood.

In the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas Aquinas called the three Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – the "ship" that carries us across the spiritual sea of life on Earth. The spiritual journey comes with rough patches and occasional obstacles. These happen when we ignore the voice of the Holy Spirit within us and the voices of those trying to keep us on track and when we give in to temptation, fail to do good, make sinful choices, or let others lead us astray. Our Catholic faith helps us see that, like Noah and his family, we are passengers on this spiritual voyage, and we have the responsibility of taking care of God's creation.

Noah's ark, Saint Peter's boat, the sailing ship – these images tell us something important about the Church. The Church is a support, a protection, and a means to reach our goal and destination in life: eternal happiness with God in Heaven. The Church is built at God's own direction. She has been part of God's divine plan of salvation since the beginning (see CCC, 760).

Those who believe in God's Revelation, obey his commands, and trust in his promises are part of God's plan to bring new life to the Earth. When the floodwaters receded, a dove sent forth by Noah brought back an olive branch. The sight of the olive leaf showed that the waters had lessened, and he and his family would soon be able to leave their ark and walk on solid ground. Since then, the dove with the olive branch has always been a symbol of peace. The new life God promises will be a life of harmony and peace.

Learning about the Church is necessary in order to understand God's plan, and to participate in his desired outcome for the world. Once we see how the Church figures in God's divine plan and will, that she is a gift to the world, we also can better understand our place within her.

A People Called and Chosen

The purpose of the Catholic Church is to bring people to Jesus Christ for the sake of their salvation. Helping people in times of need is a sign of being Catholic Christian. We have all seen people come together to help others during

crises. It is our calling as members of the Catholic community to bring that quality to the Church and be there for others when they are faced with personal, natural, or manmade adversity.

What are the ways the Catholic Church helps others in their time of need?

What can we all do about ...

- Wars taking place in the world?
- Ecological problems?
- Those who suffer from nature and human-caused disasters?
- Ridicule and bullying that take place in our schools and in society?
- Poverty and hunger in the world?

The *Catechism* tells us that the gathering together of the Catholic Church is God's reaction to the chaos provoked by sin. And it is a reunification achieved secretly in the heart of all people. "In every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable' to God" (CCC, 761).

The covenant with Noah and the subsequent blessing by God extends to all the nations. Yet even the descendants of Noah fell into arguing, strife, competition, and discord. The account of the Tower of Babel reveals how the human tendency to go against the will of God continued to show itself.

God did not give up on the world. Instead, he pursued a plan to offer salvation to all people – a plan that unfolded in stages. The first step in this plan was that he called one person: Abram (*later given the name Abraham*).

Abram (*now called Abraham by the Lord*), in turn, responded in faith. As a sign of the covenant between them, God blessed Abraham and promised him many descendants because Abraham trusted and put his faith in God. Abraham and his wife, Sarah were blessed with a child in their old age. Through his son, Isaac, God promised to bring forth a People who would be a blessing for the whole world. The call of Abraham is the beginning of an emerging image: the Chosen People of God. The preparation for the Church begins with Abraham's call and God's promise to make Abraham the father of a great people.

"By this election, Israel is to be the sign of the future gathering of All nations. But the prophets accuse Israel of breaking the covenant ... They announce a new and eternal covenant. "Christ instituted this New Covenant." (CCC, 762)

It was *through* the election of the Chosen People that God willed to communicate his love and goodness to the world. The Israelites as a Chosen People were called into existence by God's free act of *grace*. Their history would show that the right relationship with God is a relationship of love and faithfulness. "The Law ... prepares and disposes the chosen people and each Christian for conversion and faith in the Savior God" (CCC, 1963).

"God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants. By the covenant God formed his people and revealed his law to them through Moses," (CCC, 72). God was preparing his People for the salvation destined for all. The account of the Chosen People unfolds throughout the remaining pages of the Old Testament. God makes a covenant with Abraham. He forms a relationship with his Chosen People, guides them, and protects them. They, in turn, pledge their loyalty to him. When they fall into slavery in the land of Egypt, he hears their cry and responds to their distress.

God leads Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt, saving the Chosen People from slavery. He makes a covenant with them through Moses and future reveals his plan. God will be their God and give the Chosen People protection, success, fertility, and long life. The Israelites in return will obey his Commandments. God shows the People how to live by giving them the Old Law, the *Ten Commandments*. The Old Law is the first stage of revealed law. Its morally prescriptions are summed up in the Ten Commandments. God because he loves the Israelites, knows that their happiness lies in obedience to the covenant. The Commandments are laws that God, as a loving Father, knows will be in the best interest of the Chosen People.

God's faithfulness to his covenant is unwavering. His People, however, turn away from him and worship the golden calf, for example. Moses prays on behalf of the people, and God agrees to walk among them despite their unfaithfulness. God's love is everlasting, and Moses proclaims that God is forgiving (*see CCC, 210*). God's faithfulness has marked his relationship with individuals and the Christian community through the ages. While God

is always faithful to us, we are not always faithful to him. We can, however, renew our faithfulness to God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

"In the course of its history, Israel was able to discover that God had only one reason to reveal himself to them, a single motive for choosing them from among all peoples as his special possession: his sheer gratuitous love. And thanks to the prophets Israel understood that it was again out of love that God never stopped saving them and pardoning their unfaithfulness and sins. ~CCC, 218

God leads his People through the wilderness into the Promised Land. By settling them in their land, and continuing to guide their history, God reveals himself more and more. His holiness and justice become ever more apparent.

During times of national disaster and upheaval, God sent prophets to his Chosen People to interpret these events and to speak God's Word in every new situation. The prophets sometimes chastised the people and at other times consoled them. Through the preaching of the prophets, it became clear that God called this people to be "a light to the nations" (*Isaiah 42:6*) and to show forth the glory of God, in humility and faith. Finally, in the last stage of God's plan, he sent his Son, Jesus, the Christ in whom he has established his covenant forever (*see CCC, 1965*).

The Chosen People prefigure the Church, which exists because of a free act of God's grace. The Catholic Church's calling confers on her a mission. She is chosen. She lives by faith, and all are called to belong to the new People of God, so that, in Christ, all may form one family and one People of God. Her calling is to be a sign the nations, and an instrument of God's love for the world. In humility and trust, by her very existence, she gives glory to God and leads people to a right relationship with God. "The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and instrument of the communion of God and men" (*CCC, 780*). The universal Church is a people brought into unity from the unity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christ willed that the Catholic Church be his Sacrament of salvation, meaning that Jesus is the sign and the instrument of the communion between God and humankind (*see CCC, 774-776*).

The Chosen People not only prefigure the Church. This People also played a crucial role in the emergence of the final stage of God's plan. The Chosen People of the Old Testament prepared the way for the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit. It is from this People that God brought forth the Savior.

Cathedral of Christ the Light

Cathedrals and churches have always been seen as places of spiritual refuge from the storms of life. The Cathedral church located in Oakland, California, is dedicated to Christ, the Light of the World. Situated in downtown Oakland, alongside a small lake, this cathedral has a striking appearance. Inside, the two vaults of its ceiling rise up and curve toward each other. The building was intentionally designed to look like an upside-down ark.

The footprint of the building is in the shape of the oval between two interlocking circles of an equal radius. This shape, called a vesical piscis, is often used in religious art. Archimedes of Syracuse (*d. 212 B.C.*), the vesical piscis has been a subject of mathematical interest. The ratio of its width to its height is the square root of three (*or 1.7320508...*). if you were to draw a straight line connecting the center of the two circles, then draw a line to the two points at which the circles meet, you would create two equilateral triangles, joined at the edge. The vesical piscis shape represents the idea of "congregation," a gathering that is more than the sum of its parts.

The name "Christ the Light" was chosen to recall the Vatican II document on the Church, which begins with the words: "Christ is the light of all nations ..." The Diocese of Oakland was making a promise by dedicating their cathedral to Christ the Light. The promise is that they would try to be the kind of Church community that would bear the light of Christ to all people.

The Oakland Cathedral of Christ the Light is designed to admit lots of light through its many windows. It is a beacon of light and hope to the city that surrounds it. Inside the church, there is a large image of Christ Reigning in glory, called the Omega Window. It is based on the sculpture from the medieval cathedral of Chartres in France. The image in the Omega Window is created by natural light streaming in through 94,000 tiny, laser-cut perforations in sheets of aluminum. Whenever the light changes, the images of Christ created by the perforations appears in new and different ways.

The Christian People

The account of God's Chosen People, as it has unfolded through the Old Testament from Abraham up to the time of Jesus, has in many ways shaped the Church's understanding of herself. The Church has reflected deeply on the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses, the history of God's gradual revelation of himself, and the witness of the prophets – all in light of the revelation in Jesus Christ, God revealing himself fully by sending his own Son.

The Old Testament defined the life of the Chosen People, and gave them guidance for how to live. In the New Testament, Jesus establishes the *New Covenant* that unites and guides the Church through the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is the sign of this New Covenant, offered in his Blood. "Jesus did not abolish the Law of Sinai, but rather fulfilled it (*cf. Mt 5:17-19*) with such perfection (*cf. Jn 8:46*) that he revealed its ultimate meaning (*cf. Mt 5:33*) and redeemed the transgressions against it (*cf. Heb 9:15*)" (CCC, 592). The law of love, grace, and freedom that Jesus taught is the foundation of the way of life that characterizes the Church. Our identity is defined not by keeping the Old Covenant, but by loving others as Jesus Christ loved us.

The way we love as Jesus did is more than simply loving others. It is a giving of ourselves by adhering to the truth Christ has revealed through the Church he instituted. This gift of self-results in our freedom through living a moral life, faithful to the Church. True freedom comes only through doing what is good and just (*see CCC, 1733*). Love is an action and involves sacrifice. Love is a discipline that we live out by cultivating virtue in our lives and following God's Commandments.

"The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God."
~CCC, 2044

Scripture portrays these truths for us. The Church has always venerated the Word of God as she does the Body and Blood of Christ. Sacred Scripture gives us nourishment and strength, making it really important to our lives as Catholics.

The early Church saw the Old Testament as containing the revelation of God's plan of salvation for all people. Early Church members recognized the unity of this plan in the Old and New Testaments, studied the prophecies of the coming Messiah, and showed how Jesus fulfilled them. New Testament writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down faithfully the teachings of Jesus and in the Old Testament in light of his Death and Resurrection (*see CCC, 129*).

We cannot forget that the Old Testament is in fact Revelation affirmed by Christ himself. Studying the Old Testament points to God's divine plan of salvation. But Old Testament accounts such as the calling of the patriarchs and the Exodus from Egypt retain their value in God's plan (*see CCC, 130*).

The Church is called the *People of God*, which is a phrase modeled on the Old Testament designation of the People of Israel as God's People. The Church is a people that originate in the love of Christ. She is a visible and spiritual body. It is through faith and the Sacrament of Baptism that we become part of the People of God, the Church. The new People of God is open to all people so that all might become part of the united family of God.

Because the Church is a gathering of people called together by God, she owes her very existence to God and not to any merely human agency, plan, or project.

The Chosen People, the Israelites, are ancestors of the Jewish People. The CIA World Factbook distinguishes between the ethnic population of Jews and those who are connected with the Jewish faith. The ethnic group comprises more than 76 percent of the population in Israel. About one percentage points less of the ethnic group were born in Israel, about 23 percent were born in Europe, or the United States, and about 6 percent originated in Asia. Among religions in Israel, about 75 percent are Jewish, 17 percent Muslim, and 2 percent Christian, and about 5 percent other.

The Church in the New Testament

The Gospels enlighten our understanding of the Church as they describe the parables, teachings, and events in the life of Jesus. The *Catechism* tells us that Jesus' life was a constant teaching, a constant revealing of God to us through his people. His acceptance of sacrifice, and his Resurrection.

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.”

~Hebrew 1:1-2

In the New Testament, the Church is called the Body of Christ and the Bride of the Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus and later the Apostles used things that grow in nature as metaphors for the Church in the New Testament. For example, Jesus uses the metaphors farms, fields, and vineyards.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”

~John 15:5

- First, Jesus is trying to point out that the Church is living. She has roots. She grows. She’s not a once and for all establishment.
- Second, she requires cultivation. She must be cared for.
- Third, there is mystery about her. Living things can surprise us. They grow in size, seemingly without much assistance. Those who care for plants, trees, and fields know God’s hand is at work in the mystery of life.
- Fourth, living things produce nourishment – good food, nourishing food for people to eat. Well-cultivate plants and fields help people to live well.
- Fifth, living things grow abundantly. When the New Testament compares the Church to a field or a plant, it talks about how abundant her produce is. The metaphors of fields show us the Church flourishing – often beyond human expectation.

The Catholic Church is a mystery into which we must enter with faith.

“The Church is both visible and spiritual, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christs. She is one, yet formed of two components, human divine. That is her mystery, which only faith can accept.”

~CCC,779

Category	Image	Scripture
<i>Plant life</i>	<i>Cultivated field, vine, trees, seeds</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 3:6, John 15:1-8, Matthew 7:17, Luke 8:5-8</i>
<i>Architecture</i>	<i>Temple. Building, foundation, stones</i>	<i>Ephesians 2:19-21, 1 Corinthians 3:9, Corinthians 3:11, 1 Peter 2:4-7</i>
<i>The human body</i>	<i>Body of Christ, Christ the Head of the Body, many different members</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 12:27, Colossians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 12:12-20</i>
<i>Human relationships</i>	<i>Bride of Christ, family or household of God</i>	<i>Revelation 21:9, Hebrews 3:6</i>

In the New Testament, the Church is also described as the Temple of the Holy Spirit; the place where the desire for what is good and holy is initiated and fostered. The Church is the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. Writing to the Church in Corinth, Saint Paul explains where the Holy Spirit lives: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit is also the soul of the Catholic Church.

“The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the soul, as it were, of the Mystical Body, the source of its life, of its unity in diversity, and of the riches of its gifts and charisms ... The universal Church is a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (LG 4 citing St. Cyprian, De Dom. Orat. 23: PL 4, 553)

~CCC, 809, 810

Christ gave the Church a structure that will endure until the Kingdom is achieved. The Holy Spirit gathers us into the one Body of Christ where everyone’s gifts are shared for the good of all and as a witness to the love of Jesus that renews the face of the earth.

The Church is a temple built on the witness and testimony of the Apostles through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ is its cornerstone that holds the temple together. Just like the body, the Church has many different parts

with many different ministries and gifts. But all the parts are united as one in Christ. We cannot say we can do without one another, just as one part of the body cannot reject other parts of the body.

There is also a number of times in the New Testament when the Church is compared to human relationships. The Church is described as the Bride of Christ and as the family of God. The metaphor of the bride points out how dearly Jesus loves the Church and how deeply he is committed to her. Jesus described himself as a bridegroom (see *Mark 2:19*). The Apostles describe the Church as “Betrothed” to Christ the Lord so as to become but one spirit with him ... He has joined her with himself in an everlasting covenant and never stops caring for her as for his own body: (CCC, 796). All the strong elements of love, trust, and fidelity between Christ and his Church are expressed in the image of the Bible.

Faithful human relationships are vital to the Church, as the family of God. It is in the communion of our Christian families that we learn the meaning of faith, hope, and charity. The work of the family to educate children in the faith reflects God the Father’s work in creation (see CCC, 2055). The Christian family models its prayer life and sacrifice after that of Christ. In the same way, the family is called to evangelize and to reach outside itself in a missionary way.

“Becoming a disciple of Jesus means accepting the invitation to belong to God’s family, to live in conformity with His way of life: ‘For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.’

~CCC, 2233

Setting the Foundation for Christ’s Mission

Jesus Christ set the groundwork for his Church by gathering his Apostles and disciplines around him, and sharing with them his life, teachings, and mission. These first followers formed the nucleus of the community that would flower into the Church when the Holy Spirit descended on them at *Pentecost*. This “little flock” shepherded by Jesus, (*Luke 12:32*) was a community of disciples who followed him and accepted his teachings. Eventually, they proclaimed his message of the Kingdom to all nations (see CCC, 767).

At the time, followers of Christ were still considered members of the Jewish community but with one clear difference. As the fulfillment of the promised Messiah, the Church proclaimed Jesus as “the way” to truth and “the way” to eternal life. “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (*John 14:6*). As the people of *The Way*, the early Church clearly identified herself with living the life and teachings of Jesus.

Signs and wonders accompanied the Apostles as they carried out their mission for Jesus. These miraculous signs drew attention to their message. The essence of the mission was to share the Good News and to call people to faith and conversion. It is a mission on which the Apostles and their successors have continued to lead the Church since her founding. “What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations, until Christ returns in glory” (CCC, 96).

“The Spirit of truth ... will be given by the Father in answer to Jesus’ prayer; he will be sent by the Father in Jesus’ name; and Jesus will send him from the Father’s side, since he comes from the Father” (CCC, 729). At Pentecost, the Apostles realized that Jesus kept his promise. The Holy Spirit came, and that made all the difference. The Holy Trinity was fully revealed (see CCC, 731). Remember, as was said in the beginning of this reading, the Holy Spirit initiates and fosters the desire in us for what is good and holy. Once the Holy Spirit came upon them, the disciples of Jesus were no longer afraid. They took up their mission. The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the principal agent, becomes the mission of the Church. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (*John 20:21*).

With the sending of the Holy Spirit, the small nucleus of followers expanded greatly. Over and over, as the Apostles shared the message of Jesus, people accepted the Good News of God’s love as they came to faith and conversion. The central focus of the Apostles’ preaching was the Paschal Mystery: Jesus, who suffered, was crucified, and died for our sins, has been raised to new life and is ascended to Heaven. It was this message that helped the Church to grow exponentially through the power of the Holy Spirit revealed at Pentecost.

The mission of the Catholic Church continues to the present day. The Holy Spirit remains in us and in the Church.

“The Holy Spirit, whom Christ the head pours out on his members, builds, animates and sanctifies the Church” (CCC, 747). The mission of the Church is the same as that of Christ and the Holy Spirit – to reconcile the world to God – and it is our mission. As the *Catechism* puts it: “The Church’s mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but its sacrament” (CCC, 738).

Alive with the Holy Spirit

Each time Jesus appeared after the Resurrection, his disciples were reassured of his gift of eternal life. They got a new glimpse into his risen life. They received proof that Jesus really was alive, and had fulfilled the Father’s plan. He gave them instructions, such as the command to “feed my sheep” (*John 21:17*) and the call to make disciples of all nations” (*Matthew 28:19*).

Jesus ascended into Heaven, and the Apostles faced a new challenge to keep the message alive. Jesus had promised them the Holy Spirit. At the festival of Pentecost, which celebrated the giving of the Ten Commandments fifty days after the deliverance through the Red Sea, Jews from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem. While others celebrated, the Apostles met together in one place.

The Holy Spirit came upon them with a sound like the rushing wind. Not only did the Holy Spirit fill the house, but he filled the Apostles themselves. It was the day on which the Apostles were given the gift of true discipleship – to go out into the world to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit.

God confused the speech of people at the Tower of Babel, but at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit united all in the one speech as Saint Peter and the other Apostles proclaimed the salvation of all through the Paschal Mystery: The Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus. Pentecost was a sign. It meant that the age-old divisions and misunderstandings that burdened the human race were being lifted. The events of Babel are characterized by human pride and its consequences. The biblical account ends with confusion and incomprehension. With Pentecost, a new era begins. We see the sacrifice of Jesus, characterized by humility, bridging the gulf caused by sin between humanity and God, uniting them forever. The seeds of the Kingdom were sown; this new era, which began on Pentecost, is called the Age of the Church. It is the era we are living in now.

The Church can only be fully understood by grasping the meaning of what happened at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit revealed the Church when he came upon the Apostles (see CCC, 767). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a divine gift, continually sanctifying the Church. The sending of the Holy Spirit made known the mystery of the Trinity and changed the course of human history.

The Church was born as a *Communion*, a spiritual union with Jesus and with all who share in the faith of Jesus as Savior and Lord of all. The mystery of the Church is that she embodies the communion between God and man, and the communion of people to one another. This communion of persons is the result of Christ’s Passion in life, Death on the Cross, and Resurrection from the tomb. Blessed Pope John Paul II describes it as a “union with God brought about by Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit” (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 19). It is not the same as Holy Communion, which refers to the Body and Blood of Christ received at the Eucharist. Then and now, however, the community of the Church is filled with the Holy Spirit, galvanized by the Tradition and teaching of Christ, the Apostles, and their successors, the Pope and bishops.

The community that received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is described in many ways in the Acts of the Apostles. Their common life was marked by the Apostles’ preaching, by signs and wonders, prayer, works of charity, and sharing their goods in common. Perhaps most outstanding of all, their common life was consistently marked by celebrating the Eucharist, in some cases daily (see *Acts 2:46*). From the earliest days, the Christian community would gather on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection, for the breaking of the bread, that is, the Eucharist.

“In every generation, O God of Easter glory, you send forth your Holy Creator Spirit to breathe upon the world and make it come alive!”
~Benedictine Daily Prayer

The earliest Christians still kept the Jewish Sabbath from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday, but Sunday came to replace the Sabbath as the most important day of the week.

Keeping the Lord's Day

"The very word practice brings with to the idea of learning ... and any practice is awkward and difficult. But it is necessary to attain an kind of proficiency in the spiritual life."
~ Dorothy Day

The practice of keeping the Lord's Day has been a priority throughout the ages. It is not just something the Catholic Church taught you as a child. Among the Israelites as told in the Old Testament times, keeping the Sabbath as taken seriously. This was a day to rest and to worship God. Under Jewish law, many other activities were forbidden. The Catholic Church also takes seriously observance of the Lord's Day.

Attendance at Sunday Mass is one of the Precepts of the Church. Unless one has a serious reason for missing Mass (for example, illness or caring for an ill family member), all baptized Catholics should attend Mass on Saturday evening or Sunday. Not doing so can be a mortal sin if it is done with full knowledge and consent of the will.

"Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work."

~Deuteronomy 5:12-14

For Christians, Sunday replaces the Sabbath. The Sabbath and Sundays are not the same, although they both call for rest. The *Catechism* refers to the Lord's Day as the "eighth day" (CCC, 2191).

Since the early Church, the practice of keeping the Lord's Day consists of two things: worship and rest. More than ever, our lives are busy and noisy. We are going non-stop, multi-tasking in order to meet our responsibilities, pulled in different directions, and bombarded with new info, late breaking news, and the latest social bit of information. The *Catechism* points out that on Sundays we are to "abstain from those labors and business concerns which impede the worship to be rendered to God: (CIC, can. 1247) (CCC, 2193). The reason is to allow time to renew ourselves and to enrich our family, social, and religious lives. In fact, we are to avoid doing things that would keep others from observing the Lord's Day.

Keeping the Lord's Day through the ancient dynamics of worship and rest:

Reminds you of who you are. You can drift away from values that you believe in the most, the soulful dreams your heart holds most dear, your personal integrity, and your promise to become a disciple of Christ. The everyday tasks, relationships, social interactions, tensions, and decisions can cause you to lose your way.

Reminds you of whose you are. You come from God. You will return to God. The life you have is a gift God gave you. You are a child of God and a brother/sister to all the other children of God. It's easy to forget all this – it's nothing something society reminds us about.

Remind you of Christ's saving grace. When we gather for the Eucharist, we remember what Jesus said, who he is, and what he did for us. "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

They set aside Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day to celebrate Christ's Resurrection. When Christians keep Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist, they participate in a two-thousand-year old tradition. Sunday for us is different from the Sabbath. For Christian, as the *Catechism* explains, Sunday's "ceremonial observance replaces that of the Sabbath" (CCC, 2175).

Saint Justin Martyr lived in the second century. He was the son of a Roman nobleman but was also a prolific writer and student of philosophy. He was baptized into the Church and wrote one of the earliest accounts of Christians. He was executed for his faith along with several companions. Here he describes the Eucharist in 148A.D.

"For the apostles, in the memories composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, said, "This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;" and that, after the same manner, have taken The cup and given thanks, he said, "This is My blood; and gave it to them alone."
Bv ~Saint Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chapter 66

Saint Paul and the other sacred writers of the New Testament confirm that the early Christian community was guided by the Holy Spirit. The Church had to make important decisions, like the one relating to circumcision.

The first disciples were all Jewish. Jewish men were circumcised in keeping with the Law of Moses. Once non-Jewish converts began to join the Church in large numbers, leaders had to decide whether those who had never been Jewish could join the Church *without* being circumcised or keeping the Law of Moses. To address this problem, Acts 15 says that the Church held a council in Jerusalem to decide on this and other matters. The Apostle Peter took a role of leadership at this meeting and announced the final decision. This highlights the special authority given to Saint Peter and his successors as bishops of Rome, or Pope. At the council, it was decided to open the Church to the uncircumcised. The Holy Spirit guided them and gave them confidence that this was what God wanted.

Jesus was circumcised at the proper time after his birth. This connected Jesus with Abraham's descendants. He was incorporated into the People of the Covenant and everything that goes with that, such as obeying the Ten Commandments. He took part in the worship of Israel throughout his life. Circumcision then is a type of Baptism, and once again makes the point that the Old Testament prepares us for the New Testament. Circumcision is a sign that "prefigures that 'circumcision of Christ' which is Baptism" (CCC, 527).

The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church as she discerns the "*signs of the times*," and interprets them in light of Jesus' Gospel message. But the Church is not like other community organizations. Which can sometimes decide what to do based on a vote or the sentiments of the people. The Catholic Church seeks to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit faithfully to discern wisely, and to further Christ's mission on Earth. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit keeps the Church anchored in truth until the day when she will find her fulfillment in Heaven. The Pope and bishops, as the Magisterium, play a vital role in the living, teaching authority of the Church.

Because the Church is God's way of bringing people to salvation, she is important for every human person, without exception. The Church keeps alive the memory of what Jesus did – his saving Death and Resurrection – and continues to teach what he taught as handed down from the Apostles. The Church is also charged with sharing the message of Jesus with everyone, through the power of the Holy Spirit. "The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and instrument of the communion of God and men" (CCC, 780).

Christ established his Church as an organization to communicate his grace, truth and salvation. By the witness of her very existence, her joy, her worship and her Sacraments, the Church is an effective sign of God's love.

****answer questions on pages 23-25**

Part III The Church of Mercy: by Pope Francis I

The Embrace of God's Mercy (homily given on April 7, 2013)

What a beautiful truth of faith this is for our lives: the mercy of God! God's love for us is so great, so deep; it is an unending love, one that always takes us by the hand and supports us, lifts us up, and leads us on.

In the Gospel of John (20:19-28), the apostle Thomas personally experiences this mercy of God, which has a concrete face: the face of Jesus, the risen Jesus. Thomas does not believe it when the other apostles tell him, "We have seen the Lord." It isn't enough for him that Jesus had foretold it, promised it: "On the third day I will rise." He wants to see, he wants to put his hand in the place of the nails and in Jesus' side. And how does Jesus react? With *patience*: Jesus does not abandon Thomas in his stubborn unbelief; he gives him a week's time. He does not close the door; he waits. And Thomas acknowledges his own poverty, his little faith: "My Lord and my God!" with this simple yet faith-filled invocation, he responds to Jesus' patience. He lets himself be enveloped by divine mercy; he sees it before his eyes, in the wounds of Christ's hands and feet and in his open side, and he discovers trust. He is a new man, no longer an unbeliever, but a believer.

Let us also remember Peter: three times he denied Jesus, precisely when he should have been closest to him. And when he hits rock bottom, he meets the gaze of Jesus who patiently, wordlessly, says to him, "Peter, don't be afraid of your weakness, trust in me." Peter understands, feels the loving gaze of Jesus, and he weeps. How beautiful is this gaze of Jesus – how much tenderness is there! Brothers and sisters, let us never lose trust in the patience and mercy of God!

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*Let us remember this is our lives as Christians: God always waits for us,  
even when we have left him behind!*  
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Let us think too of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: their sad faces, their barren journey, their despair. But Jesus does not abandon them: he walks beside them, and not only that! Patiently he explains the Scriptures, which spoke of him, and he stays to share a meal with them. This is God's way of doing things: he is not impatient like us, who often want everything all at once, even in our dealings with other people. God is patient with us because he loves us, and those who love are able to understand, to hope, and to inspire confidence. They do not give up, they do not burn bridges, and they are able to forgive. Let us remember this in our lives as Christians: God always waits for us, even when we have left him behind! He is never far from us, and if we return to him, he is ready to embrace us.

I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful father; it impresses me because it always gives me great hope. Think of that younger son who was in the father's house, who was loved; and yet he wants his part of the inheritance. He goes off, spending everything, hits rock bottom, where he could not be more distant from the father. Yet when he is at his lowest, he misses the warmth of the father's house and goes back. And the father? Had he forgotten the son? No, never. He is there, he sees the son from afar; he is waiting for him every hour of the day. The son was always in the father's heart, even though he had left him, even though he had squandered his whole inheritance, his freedom. The father, with patience, love, hope, and mercy had never for a second stopped thinking about him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach: his son has returned! And that is the joy of the father. In that embrace for his son is all this joy: he has returned! God is always waiting for us; he never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence, hope – always! A great German theologian, Romano Guardini, said that God responds to our weakness by his patience, and this is the reason for our confidence, our hope. It is like a dialogue between our weakness and the patience of God; it is a dialogue that, if we have it, will grant us hope.

****answer question on page 28**

Part I: A Way of Life and Love

Directions: Match the term or name in the first column with the phrase in the second column that fits it best.

Column 1

1. Blessed Miguel Pro
2. Paschal Mystery
3. Saint Teresa of Avila
4. Human Dignity
5. Passover
6. Conviction
7. Spiritual poverty
8. Triptych
9. Agape
10. Philia

Column 2

- a. love between friends
- b. Jewish celebration of their faith
- c. The absence of God in our lives
- d. Christ's work of saving us from our sins
- e. divine, selfless love
- ab. presentation of three related images
- ac. martyr for the faith beatified in 1988
- ad. the foundation of the Church's teaching on social justice
- ae. belief in something worth doing or believing
- bc. named a doctor of the Church in 1970

Directions: Write the letter of the correct answer on the space provided on the answer sheet.

11. What are the four wounds of Original Sin according to Saint Thomas Aquinas?
 - a. Ignorance, laziness, selfishness, anger
 - b. Stupidity, ego, selfishness, dishonesty
 - c. Ignorance, malice, weakness, disorder
 - d. Intensity, malice, brutality, disorganization

12. We are called to be holy because
 - a. God insists upon it.
 - b. Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is holy.
 - c. Christ called us to be holy in The Great Commandment.
 - d. Everyone is automatically holy because God created us.

13. In what encyclical did Saint John Paul II make the connection between the Paschal Mystery and our own spiritual lives?
 - a. Deus Caritas Est
 - b. Lumen Gentium
 - c. Dei Verbum
 - d. Evangelium Vitae

14. Which of the Gospels include the Passion Narratives?
 - a. Mark and Luke
 - b. John only
 - c. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
 - d. Matthew, Mark and Luke

15. How do you acquire holiness?
 - a. by acquiring wealth
 - b. through becoming powerful
 - c. it is automatically given to us by God when we are born
 - d. through the Church and by the grace of God

16. What are the essential elements of spirituality?
 - a. reflection, self-examination, and introspection
 - b. withdrawal, solitude, separation
 - c. silence, research, reading
 - d. piety, humility, and supplication

17. What do the words *Pascha* and *Pesach* mean?
 - a. Paschal and Pentecost
 - b. They both mean Passover
 - c. They both mean Paschal
 - d. Easter and Passover

18. What practice in Catholic history reached a high point in the Middle Ages?
 - a. wearing a crucifix
 - b. making pilgrimages

c. confessing sins

d. building churches

19. Who established the Lay Missionaries of Charity?

- a. Saint Teresa of Avila
- c. Saint Theresa of Lisieux

- b. Saint Marianne Cope of Molokai
- d. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta

20. The New Testament contains how many Greek words for love?

- a. one
- b. two
- c. three
- d. four

Part II: Why Study the Church

Directions: Match the term or name in the first column with the phrase in the second column that fits it best.

Column 1

- 21. Abraham
- 22. grace
- 23. disciple
- 24. Saint Paul
- 25. Noah
- 26. Pentecost
- 27. vesical pisis
- 28. covenant
- 29. Moses
- 30. communion

Column 2

- a. individual chosen by God to survive the Great Flood
- b. the ancestor of the chosen people
- c. term used to describe Jesus' followers
- d. first wrote about the Body of Christ
- e. feast day celebrated fifty days after Easter
- ab. leader of the Chosen People
- ac. a sacred promise between God and one or more human beings
- ad. a shape used in church art and architecture
- ae. spiritual union with Jesus and the faithful
- bc. God's unmerited _____.

Directions: Write the letter of the correct answer on the space provided on the answer sheet.

31. Which action illustrates someone calling another to the Church through example?

- a. sharing food with another person
- b. praying for a special intention
- c. giving a religious object as a gift
- d. giving money in the weekly collection

32. Which sacrament is linked through an interpretation of the flood story?

- a. Eucharist
- b. Matrimony
- c. Baptism
- d. Confirmation

33. What is the lesson from the Tower of Babel story?

- a. God cares for his people in special ways.
- b. Covenants cannot be broken by people.
- c. Humans should not try to build great structures.
- d. Going against God's will causes suffering.

34. Which is *not* a metaphor Jesus used in his teaching?

- a. the beast with ten horns
- b. the cultivated field
- c. the mustard seed
- d. the vine and the branches

35. What is *not* a function of prophets?

- a. interpreting events
- b. ending all forms of injustice
- c. consoling others
- d. speaking God's words

36. Which two people made covenants with God?

- a. Peter and Paul
- b. Ambrose and Augustine
- c. Jerome and Thomas
- d. Abraham and Moses

37. Which choice is the most essential part of the disciples' mission?

- a. performing miracles
- b. interpreting signs

c. sharing Jesus' teachings

d. supporting the Chosen People

38. Why did God choose to save Noah and his family?

a. They spoke many languages.

b. They listened and obeyed God.

c. They taught others using metaphors.

d. They had great wealth.

39. Which choice most clearly defines the Church's mission today?

a. following all the laws described in Leviticus

b. being Christ's light in the world

c. teaching how saints interpreted events

d. the Torah

40. Which event strengthened the disciples and helped them find voices to deliver Jesus' message?

a. the raising of Jesus at the Resurrection

b. the Church discussion at the council of Jerusalem

c. the meeting with angels after Jesus' Ascension

d. the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

