
HOW TO BE A BETTER CATHOLIC

UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

"All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity."¹ "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."² God wants us to be holy. One must try to sanctify oneself in one's place within the Church of Christ.

"[Lay Christians] live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven."³

"By their very vocation, they seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations."⁴

"Hence the laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and prepared, so that even richer fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucha-

1. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* (=LG), 31. Mt 5:48.

2. Mt 5:48.

3. LG, 31.

4. *Ibidem*.

rist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives."⁵

"Priests will acquire holiness in their own distinctive way by exercising their functions sincerely and tirelessly in the Spirit of Christ.

"Since they are ministers of the Word of God, they read and hear every day the Word of God, which they must teach to others. If they strive at the same time to make it part of their own lives, they will become daily more perfect disciples of the Lord...."⁶

In order to sanctify ourselves in the ordinary circumstances of our life, we need to grow in our spiritual life, especially through prayer, self-denial, and work.

Life of Prayer

"We learn to pray at certain moments by hearing the Word of the Lord and sharing in his paschal mystery, but his Spirit is offered us at all times, in the events of *each day*, to make prayer spring up from us."⁷

"Prayer in the events of each day and each moment is one of the secrets of the kingdom revealed to 'little children,' to the servants of Christ, to the poor of the Beatitudes. It is right and good to pray so that the coming of the kingdom of justice and peace may influence the march of history, but it is just as important to bring the help of prayer into humble, everyday situations; all forms of prayer can be the leaven to which the Lord compares the kingdom."⁸

5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (=CCC), 901, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994; cf. LG 10, 34; 1 Pt 2:5.

6. Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (=PO), 20; cf. 1 Tm 4:15–16.

7. CCC, 2659; cf. Mt 6:11, 34.

8. CCC, 2660; cf. Lk 13:20–21.

"But do not imagine that prayer is an action to be carried out and then forgotten. The just man 'delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night. Through the night, I meditate on you' and 'my prayer comes to you like incense in the evening.' Our whole day can be a time of prayer—from night to morning and from morning to night."⁹

Life of Self-Denial

"The way of perfection passes by way of the cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes."¹⁰ "Without mortification there is no happiness on earth."¹¹

"Let us listen to our Lord: 'He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little thing is dishonest also in much.' It is as if he were saying to us: 'Fight continuously in the apparently unimportant things which are to my mind important; fulfill your duty, punctually; smile at whoever needs cheering up, even though there is sorrow in your soul; devote the necessary time to prayer, without haggling; go to the help of anyone who looks for you; practice justice, and go beyond it with the grace of charity.'"¹²

Self-denial will be more precious if it is united to charity according to the teaching of St. Leo the Great: "Let us give to virtue what we refuse to self-indulgence. Let what we deny ourselves by fast be the refreshment of the poor."

9. St. Josemaria Escriva, *Christ is Passing By* (=CPB), 119, Princeton, N.J.: Scepter Publishers, 1974.

10. CCC, 2015; cf. 2 Tm 2:4.

11. St. Josemaria Escriva, *Furrow* (=FW), 983, Princeton, N.J.: Scepter Publishers, 1988.

12. CPB, 77.

Life of Work

*"Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. Hence work is a duty: 'If any one will not work, let him not eat.' Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ."*¹³

"In work, the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work.

*"Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community."*¹⁴

13. CCC, 2427; cf. *Gaudium et Spes* (=GS), 34; Gn 1:28; 9:14–18; *Centesimus Annus* (=CA), 31; 2 Thes 3:10; 4:11; *Laborem Exercens* (=LE), 27.

14. CCC, 2428; cf. LE, 6.

SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

We are required to know and to believe:

- That there is one supreme, eternal, infinite God, the Creator of Heaven and earth.
- That the good will be rewarded by him for ever in Heaven, and that the wicked who die unrepentant will be punished for ever in Hell.
- That in the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, coeternal, coequal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
- That the Second Person of the Holy Trinity became man and died on the Cross to save us.
- The tenets of the *Apostles' Creed*.
- In the *Commandments of God and of the Church*.
- That the *Seven Sacraments* were instituted by Christ to give us grace; especially, that Baptism is necessary and that the Eucharist is a pledge of our future glory.
- That *Sacred Tradition* and *Sacred Scripture*, which together form one sacred deposit of the Word of God, are entrusted to the Church.
- Whatever God teaches us by his Church, who in her teaching cannot deceive us or be deceived.

“‘The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys [this] infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful, he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals.... The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the supreme ‘Magisterium,’ above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine ‘for belief as being divinely revealed’ and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions ‘must be adhered to with the obedience of faith.’”¹⁵

15. Cf. CCC, 891.

SPIRITUAL GAME PLAN

Do you want to be a good Christian? The first of your battles will be to enter into and remain in the state of grace, to avoid any mortal sin. And, then, because you want to love God above all things, you will also try not to commit venial sins.

The practice of some acts of piety throughout the day will help you to have a divine contemplative life in the midst of the daily routine. The habitual performance of these acts will also be the foundation for growing in Christian virtues. Most important is to be consistent in your daily schedule, in your spiritual game plan, so that you will live as a child of God.

Daily

- *Get up at a fixed time*, as early as possible. Eight hours of sleep should be enough. More than this or less than six hours of sleep is usually not healthy.
- *Offer your day* to God through the intercession of our Lady.
- *Work with order and intensity* during the day as a way of serving God. Set goals and establish priorities in order to develop a practical schedule. Sanctifying ordinary work is the goal of our life.
- *Try to attend Mass, receiving Holy Communion*, as often as possible. This is the best sacrifice we can offer to God. Prepare yourself for Mass by spending some time in prayer.
- *Spend some time in mental prayer* before the Blessed Sacrament (15 minutes, if possible).
- *Pray the Angelus*. Traditionally, the *Angelus* is prayed at sunrise (6:00 A.M.), noon, and sunset

(6:00 P.M.). (During Easter Time, say the *Regina Cæli* instead.)

- Pray the *Rosary*, if possible, with your family, offering each decade for a specific intention.
- Do some other *spiritual reading*. Start with the New Testament or some well-known spiritual book. Ten to fifteen minutes is sufficient.
- Make a short *examination of conscience* at the end of the day before going to bed. Two or three minutes is enough. Follow these steps: Humble yourself in the presence of God. Tell him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." Ask for light to acknowledge your defects and virtues and to see the dangers and opportunities of the day. Ask for repentance, amendment, and encouragement.

Weekly

- Center all activities around the *Holy Mass* on *Sunday*, the Lord's Day. It is also a family day — for rest and spiritual growth.
- If you do not receive Holy Communion every day, receive at least on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
- Saturday is traditionally dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Honor her and say some special prayer, such as the *Hail Holy Queen*.

Monthly

- Go to *Confession* at least once a month. It is the sacrament of joy. Pope St. John Paul II says: "God is always the one who is principally offended by sin — 'I have sinned against You' — and God alone can forgive. He does so through the ministry

of the priest in the Sacrament of Penance, which is the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and remission of mortal sins. Every mortal sin must always be stated with its determining circumstances in an individual confession."¹⁶

- Seek and follow the *spiritual guidance* of a wise, prudent, and knowledgeable priest.
- *Spend a few hours in recollection*, best done before the Blessed Sacrament. Consider how you are directing your life toward God.

Yearly

- *Spend two or three days each year in silence*, speaking with God only. A few days of *retreat* are necessary for the soul in the same way that the body needs a vacation. It is a yearly opportunity for conversion.

Always

- Stay in the *presence of God*: be aware that he is always close to you. Try to please him in everything as a child tries to please his/her parents.
- *Thank God* for the graces that he constantly gives you.
- Do everything *for the love of God*: this is purity of intention. Always purify your intention. Make *acts of contrition* and *atonement* for your sins and sins of others.
- Try to *live as you would like to die*. We shall die as we have lived.

16. St. John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance* (=RP), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984.

PLAN OF LIFE

Our Lord is quite happy if we offer him little tokens of love any moment of the day.

Try to commit yourself to a plan of life and to keep to it:

- a few minutes of mental prayer;
- Holy Mass — daily, if you can manage it — and frequent Communion;
- regular recourse to the Holy Sacrament of Forgiveness — even though your conscience does not accuse you of mortal sin;
- visiting Jesus in the tabernacle;
- praying and contemplating the mysteries of the Holy Rosary;
- and so many other marvelous devotions you know or can learn.

You should not let them become rigid rules, or water-tight compartments. They should be flexible, to help you on your journey you who live in the middle of the world, with a life of hard professional work and social ties and obligations which you should not neglect, because in them your conversation with God still continues. Your plan of life ought to be like a rubber glove which fits the hand perfectly.

THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

"The [seven] sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions."¹⁷

Baptism¹⁸

By which we are born into the new life in Christ

The fruits of this Sacrament are:

- Remission of Original Sin.
- Birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- Incorporation into the Church, the Body of Christ, and participation in the priesthood of Christ.
- The imprinting, on the soul, of an indelible spiritual sign, the *character*, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. Because of this *character*, Baptism cannot be repeated.

Confirmation¹⁹

By which we are more perfectly bound to the Church and enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit

The fruits of this Sacrament are:

- An increase and deepening of baptismal grace.
- A deepening of one's roots in the divine filiation, which makes one cry, "Abba, Father!"

17. CCC, 1131.

18. Cf. CCC, 1277–1279.

19. Cf. CCC, 1303–1316.

- A firming of one's unity with Christ.
- An increase of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- A strengthening of one's bond with the Church and closer association with her mission.
- Special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the Faith by word and action as a true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and to never be ashamed of the Cross.
- The imprinting, as in Baptism, of a spiritual mark or indelible *character* on the Christian's soul. Because of this *character*, one can receive this Sacrament only once in one's life.

The Holy Eucharist²⁰

*By which Christ associates his Church
and all her members with the sacrifice of the cross*

The fruits of this Sacrament are:

- An increase in the communicant's union with Christ.
- Forgiveness of venial sins.
- Preservation from grave sins.
- A strengthening of the bonds of charity between the communicant and Christ.
- A strengthening of the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

20. Cf. CCC, 1407, 1413, 1416. The Holy Eucharist is really, truly, and substantially the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine. The Holy Eucharist is not only a sacrament; it is also a sacrifice—the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Reconciliation or Penance²¹

By which sins after Baptism are forgiven

The fruits of this Sacrament are:

- Reconciliation with God: the penitent recovers sanctifying grace.
- Reconciliation with the Church.
- Remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins.
- Remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin.
- Peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation.
- An increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

Anointing of the Sick²²

*By which a special grace
is conferred during grave illness or old age*

The fruits of this Sacrament are:

- Unity with the Passion of Christ, for the sick person's own good and that of the whole Church.
- Strength, peace, and courage to endure as a Christian the sufferings of illness or old age.
- Forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the Sacrament of Penance.
- Restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of the soul.
- Preparation for entering eternal life.

21. Cf. CCC, 1486, 1497. Individual and integral confession of grave sins followed by absolution remains the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and with the Church.

22. Cf. CCC, 1527, 1532.

Holy Orders²³

*By which the task of serving
in the name and in the Person of Christ is conferred*

The fruits of this Sacrament are:

- *The mission and faculty* ("the sacred power") to act *in persona Christi*.
- Configuration to Christ as Priest, Teacher, and Pastor.
- The imprinting, as in Baptism, of an indelible *character* that cannot be repeated or conferred temporarily.

Matrimony²⁴ (See *Church Laws Concerning Marriage*, pp.29 ff.)

*By which a man and a woman form
with each other an intimate communion of life and love*

The fruits of this Sacrament for the spouses are:

- The grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church.
- A perfecting of their human love.
- A strengthening of their indissoluble unity.
- Sanctification on their way to Heaven.
- The grace to "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."
- An integration into God's covenant with man: *Authentic married love is caught up into divine love.*

23. Cf. CCC, 1536, 1591, 1598. It is bishops who confer the Sacrament of Holy Orders in the three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate. In the Latin Church, the Sacrament of Holy Orders for the presbyterate is normally conferred on only those candidates who are ready to embrace celibacy freely and who publicly manifest their intention of staying celibate for the love of God's kingdom and the service of others.

24. Cf. CCC, 1638, 1639, 1641, 1660, 1664. The *marriage bond* has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

"What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" "If you would enter into life, keep the Commandments."²⁵

Christ—through the example of his own life and by his preaching—attested to the permanent validity of the Ten Commandments.

The Decalogue contains a privileged expression of the natural law. It is made known to us by divine revelation and by human reason.²⁶

1. I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
You shall not have strange gods before me. You shall not make to thyself any graven thing; nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. You shall not adore them nor serve them.
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the LORD's Day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

25. Cf. Mt 19:16–17.

26. Cf. CCC, 2075, 2076, 2080.

THE BEATITUDES²⁷

"The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw us to the One who alone can fulfill it." They "teach man the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life, filiation, rest in God." They are the heart of Jesus' preaching. "They continue the promises made to the Chosen People from the time of Abraham to the time of Christ, fulfilling the promises by ordering them no longer merely to the possession of a territory, but also to the Kingdom of heaven:

- **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.** The first beatitude sets the stage for the next seven. This spirit of poverty and detachment is an essential part of the Gospel message. To possess the Kingdom of God, we need to be liberated from inordinate and unhealthy attachment to material possessions, popularity, comfort, and even personal plans.
- **Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.** An inevitable side effect of finding true joy and peace is a sorrow for so many who are deprived of the riches of the Gospel, "like sheep without a shepherd." Living the Gospel sometimes brings suffering in the form of rejection and scorn. The Lord promises that such sadness will be turned into joy.
- **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.** In light of the understanding that the Kingdom of God is not of this world, this verse falls in line with Christ's assurance of ultimate victory. It is through the lived example of a kind and meek heart along with a selfless spirit of service that the Christian can draw others to Christ's way of life.
- **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.** Idealism and

27. Cf. CCC, 1716, 1718, 1725–1726; cf. Mt 5:3–12.

magnanimity characterize the disposition of someone closely united to the Lord. Hunger and thirst for righteousness serve as the driving force of a true Christian life. The apostle of the Gospel longs to see many people enjoy the peace, happiness, justice, and healing promised by Christ. The Lord promises that in spite of hostility toward the Gospel message, the desire and zeal to bring Christ to others will eventually find fulfillment.

- **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.** The individual who practices mercy not only will obtain mercy from God for himself or herself, but also will be loved by others. Anyone with a merciful attitude will enjoy a special credibility when speaking about Jesus Christ.
- **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.** Many people lose their capacity to pray and to see the image of God in others because they are leading a self-centered and carnal life. Self-control in living the virtue of purity allows the person to see Christ in prayer, in suffering, and in the lives of others.
- **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.** Jesus promises peace to all who truly follow him. A person united to Jesus will spread peace to everyone around him or her. In imitation of the Son of God, the perfect peacemakers, those who radiate peace, are considered children of God.
- **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.** The final beatitude says that those who encounter suffering through their Christian witness will be blessed with the ultimate glory of everlasting life. Suffering for Christ and with Christ is the secret power of the Christian evangelizer. The Cross transforms those who lovingly embrace it and, in turn, transforms the world.

*THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH*²⁸

The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the indispensable minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor:

1. "You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor."

This precept requires the completion of the Sunday observance by participation in the principal liturgical feasts that honor the mysteries of the Lord, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. It requires, also, abstinence from those labors and business concerns that impede the worship to be rendered to God, the joy that is proper to the Lord's day, or the proper relaxation of mind and body.

2. "You shall confess your sins at least once a year."

This precept ensures preparation for the Eucharist by the reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation, which continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness.

3. "You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season."

This precept guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's body and blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy.

4. "You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church."

This precept ensures the times of asceticism and penance that prepare us for the liturgical feasts; they help us acquire freedom of heart and mastery over our instincts.

5. "You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church."

This precept requires the faithful to contribute to the Church according to their own abilities.

28. Cf. CCC, 2042–2043.

HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

In the United States of America

1. The Holy Days of Obligation in addition to all Sundays of the year according to the decrees* of the USCCB are:

Jan 1 The Solemnity of MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter
The Solemnity of the ASCENSION

Aug 15 The Solemnity of the
ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Nov 1 The Solemnity of ALL SAINTS

Dec 8 The Solemnity of the IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dec 25 The Solemnity of the
NATIVITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

2. "Whenever January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, or August 15, the solemnity of the Assumption, or November 1, the solemnity of All Saints, falls on a Saturday or on a Monday, the precept to attend Mass is abrogated."

3. The following solemnities are transferred or observed on a different day:

Jan 6 The Solemnity of the EPIPHANY
(shall be transferred to the first Sunday following January 1)

Second Sunday following Pentecost The Solemnity of the
MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST
(shall be observed on the second Sunday following Pentecost)

4. In some dioceses the celebration of the solemnity of the Ascension may be transferred. It is to be made by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the bishops of the respective Ecclesiastical Province.

While the Solemnities of St. Joseph and Sts. Peter and Paul remain Holy Days of Obligation in the Universal Calendar, their observance has been suppressed for Catholics in the United States (cf. CIC, 1246.2). Thus, while Mass attendance is not required, celebration of these solemnities is recommended for all the faithful.

* Given at the offices of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C., November 17, 1992, and August 6, 1999.

DAYS OF PENANCE

"Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance." "*The seasons and days of penance* in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice."²⁹

All members of the Christian faithful are, in their own way, bound to do penance in virtue of divine law. In order that all may be joined in a common observance of penance, penitential days are prescribed in which the Christian faithful, in a special way, pray; exercise works of piety and charity; and deny themselves by fulfilling their responsibilities more faithfully, and especially by observing fast and abstinence according to the following:³⁰

- The time of Lent and all Fridays of the year are, throughout the universal Church, days and times especially appropriate for spiritual exercises; penitential liturgies; pilgrimages as signs of penance; voluntary self-denial, such as fasting and almsgiving.
- Abstinence from meat (or some other food) or another penitential practice, according to the prescriptions of the conference of bishops, is to be observed on each Friday of the year unless it is a solemnity. Fast and abstinence from meat are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday.
- All persons who have completed their four-

29. CCC, 1435, 1438; cf. Lk 9:23.

30. Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici* (=CIC), 1244–1245, 1249–1253.

teenth year are bound by the law of abstinence. All adults (eighteen years or older) are bound by the law of fast up to the beginning of their sixtieth year. Pastors and parents are to see to it that minors who are not bound by a law of fast or abstinence are educated nevertheless in an authentic sense of penance.

- It is for the conference of bishops to determine more precisely the observances of fast and abstinence and to substitute in whole or in part for fast or abstinence other forms of penance, especially works of charity and exercises of piety and missionary works.
- Diocesan bishops can proclaim special days of penance for their own dioceses or territories, but only for individual occasions (*per modum actus*).

THE SACREDNESS OF HUMAN LIFE FROM CONCEPTION TO NATURAL DEATH

“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.”³¹

The family is the perfect incubator for fostering a respect for human life. In this domestic church, new life is welcomed and cherished, while the elderly and infirm are treated with respect and honor. Each member of the family is to serve the others with love and joy, never looking upon any member as a burden.³² In this way, the family will show forth in its

31. CCC 2258.

32. Cf. Eph 5:21—6:4.

care for each member the dignity inherent in all persons as images of God.

It is in the family that new life is created, and thus families have a special call to treat each human person with the dignity he or she is due. Because of the inherent worth of all human life, any killing of an innocent human being, including before birth and before natural death, is to be opposed.

WORKS OF MERCY³³

The *works of mercy* are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor's spiritual and bodily necessities. Giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity; it is also a work of justice pleasing to God.

Corporal

- Feed the hungry.
- Give drink to the thirsty.
- Shelter the homeless.
- Visit the sick.
- Visit the prisoners.
- Bury the dead.
- Give alms to the poor.

Spiritual

- Counseling the doubtful.
- Instructing the ignorant.
- Admonishing sinner.
- Comforting the sorrowful.
- Forgiving injuries.
- Bearing wrongs patiently.
- Praying for the living and the dead.

THE CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY³⁴

The Corporal Works of Mercy are found in the teachings of Jesus and give us a model for how we should treat all others, as if they were Christ in disguise. They "are charitable actions by which we help our

33. Cf. CCC, 2447.

34. www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-corporal-works-of-mercy.cfm; accessed March 1, 2019.

neighbors in their bodily needs" (USCCA). They respond to the basic needs of humanity as we journey together through this life.

The seven Corporal Works of Mercy are listed below. After each work of mercy there are also suggestions and words of advice for living them out in our daily lives....

Feed the Hungry

There are many people in this world who go without food. When so much of our food goes to waste, consider how good stewardship practices of your own food habits can benefit others who do not have those same resources.

- Having delicious food at Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner? Donate to a Thanksgiving or Christmas food drive so everyone can have something to eat.
- Research, identify and contribute financially to organizations that serve the hungry.
- The next time you make a recipe that can be easily frozen, make a double batch and donate one to your local food pantry or soup kitchen.
- Try not to purchase more food than you are able to eat. If you notice that you end up throwing groceries away each week, purchasing less groceries would eliminate waste and allow you to donate the savings to those in need.

Give Drink to the Thirsty

Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ do not have access to clean water and suffer from the lack of this basic necessity. We should support the efforts of those working towards greater accessibility of this essential resource.

- We take it for granted that we have access to clean water. Donate... to help build wells for water for those in need.

- Organize a group of children involved on a sports team (e.g. soccer) or a summer camp. Invite them to collect bottled water to distribute at a shelter for families. If parents can be involved, ask them to accompany their children in delivering the water to the families.
- Do the same for youth and young adult groups.
- Make an effort not to waste water. Remembering to turn off the water faucet when you are brushing your teeth or washing dishes can help, especially in regions suffering from drought.

Shelter the Homeless

There are many circumstances that could lead to someone becoming a person without a home. Christ encourages us to go out and meet those without homes, affirming their worth and helping them seek a resolution to the challenges they face.

- See if your parish or diocese is involved with a local homeless shelter and volunteer some time.
- Donate time or money to organizations that build homes for those who need shelter.
- Many homeless shelters need warm blankets for their beds. If you can knit or sew that would be an extra loving gift.
- There are millions of children and families who are on the move, fleeing from war, illness, hunger and impossible living conditions, and searching for peace and safety. Engage parish groups of children, youth, young adults, and families in doing some research on the causes and challenges that these families face to survive. Contact Catholic Social Services, or diocesan offices of peace and justice for help with your research. Seek ways to provide shelter for the homeless locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

Visit the Sick

Those who are sick are often forgotten or avoided. In spite of their illness, these individuals still have much to offer to those who take the time to visit and comfort them.

- Give blood
- Spend time volunteering at a nursing home – Get creative and make use of your talents (e.g. sing, read, paint, call Bingo, etc.)!
- Take time on a Saturday to stop and visit with an elderly neighbor.
- Offer to assist caregivers of chronically sick family members on a one-time or periodic basis. Give caregivers time off from their caregiving responsibilities so they can rest, complete personal chores, or enjoy a relaxing break.
- Next time you make a meal that can be easily frozen, make a double batch and give it to a family in your parish who has a sick loved one.

Visit the Prisoners

People in prison are still people, made in the image and likeness of God. No matter what someone has done, they deserve the opportunity to hear the Word of God and find the Truth of the message of Christ.

- See if your parish, or a nearby parish, has a prison ministry and if so, get involved.
- Volunteer to help out or donate to charities that give Christmas presents to children whose parents are in prison.

Bury the Dead

Funerals give us the opportunity to grieve and show others support during difficult times. Through our prayers and actions during these times we show our

respect for life, which is always a gift from God, and comfort to those who mourn.

- Send a card to someone who has recently lost a loved one. Make your own card and use some of these prayers.
- Visit the cemetery and pray for those you have lost.
- Spend time planning your own funeral mass, read through the Order of Christian Funerals and find our hope in the Resurrection.

Give Alms to the Poor

Donate money to organizations that have the ability to provide support and services for those in need. Do research and find organizations that put people in need first, rather than profit.

- Skip the morning latte and put that money in the collection basket at church.
- Find a charity that is meaningful to you and volunteer your time or donate.
- This Lent, give up eating out at restaurants. Pack your meals and donate the extra money to charities.
- Participate in CRS Rice Bowl.

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY³⁵

The Spiritual Works of Mercy have long been a part of the Christian tradition, appearing in the works of theologians and spiritual writers throughout history. Just as Jesus attended to the spiritual well-being of those he ministered to, these Spiritual Works of Mercy guide us to “help our neighbor in their spiritual needs” (USCCA). The seven Spiritual Works of Mercy are listed below. After each work of mercy there are also suggestions

35. www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-spiritual-works-of-mercy.cfm; accessed March 1, 2019.

and words of advice for living them out in our daily lives....

Counseling the Doubtful

Everyone has moments of doubt in their faith journey. Nevertheless, we should always remember that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and turn to him along our way.

- “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may eventually become wise” (Prv 19:20).
- The Cross of Christ “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:25).
- Has someone asked you for advice? Orient your response to Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
- Follow Christ with the witness of your life so that others may see God’s love revealed in your actions.
- Accompany a friend who is struggling with believing to join a parish group for service or faith formation, share a book you found useful in dealing with your friend’s faith concern, and worship at Sunday Mass.

Instructing the Ignorant

Learn about our faith and be open to talking with others about our beliefs. There is always something more to discover about our faith.

- Go on a service trip or short term mission trip. No time? Donate to support someone on their service trip.
- Volunteer to help with religious education programs at your parish.
- Invite someone to go to mass with you this weekend.

- Know your faith! Read through the USCCA to find out more about the Catholic faith and how to live it.

Admonishing the Sinner

Do not judge, but be supportive in helping others find their way and correct their mistakes. Together we can learn to walk more closely with Christ.

- In humility we must strive to create a culture that does not accept sin, while realizing that we all fall at times.
- Don't judge, but guide others towards the path of salvation (see Mt 7:1–2).
- When you correct someone, don't be arrogant. We are all in need of God's loving correction.
- We should journey together to a deeper understanding of our shared faith.
- "Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye" (Mt 7:5).

Comforting the Sorrowful

Be open to listening and comforting those who are dealing with grief. Even if we aren't sure of the right words to say, our presence can make a big difference.

- Lend a listening ear to those going through a tough time.
- Make a home cooked meal for a friend who is facing a difficult time.
- Write a letter or send a card to someone who is suffering.
- A few moments of your day may make a lifetime of difference to someone who is going through a difficult time.

Forgiving injuries

Forgiving others is difficult at times because we do not have God's limitless mercy and compassion.

But Jesus teaches us that we should forgive as God forgives, relying on him to help us show others the mercy of God.

- Let go of grudges.
- Saying sorry is something we learn as kids, but how often do we really mean it? Forgiveness transforms hearts and lives.
- Participate in the Sacrament of Penance.
- Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet.

Bearing Wrongs Patiently

Do not be bitter about wrongs done against you. Place your hope in God so that you can endure the troubles of this world and face them with a compassionate spirit.

- Frustrated with someone? Step away from the situation, take a few deep breaths, pray the Our Father, asking God for patience.

Praying for the Living and the Dead

Prayer is one of the most powerful ways we can support others. Joining together in prayer for the living and the dead entrusts us all into God's care.

- Request a mass intention for a friend or family member who is going through a tough time.
- Request a mass intention for a friend or family member who has passed away.
- Keep your own book of prayer intentions, writing down the names of those who you are keeping in your prayers.
- Ask a friend or family member if there is anything you can pray for them about.
- Through prayer, entrust your cares and concerns for those around you to God.

CHURCH LAWS CONCERNING MARRIAGE³⁶

Matrimony — defined as the *marriage covenant by which a man and woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life* — is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring. For a baptized couple, this covenant has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. Because Christ instituted this sacrament, he also gives a man and a woman their vocation to marriage. The covenant thus involves not only a man and a woman, but also Christ. In establishing marriage as a vocation in life, God gave it the characteristics that enable human love to achieve its perfection and allow family life to be full and fruitful. Outside marriage, or without a proper realization of its nature, the right conditions for the fruitfulness of human love and for a successful family life do not exist.

The Catholic Church has the right to establish laws regarding the validity of marriages, since marriage for the baptized is both a covenant and a sacrament. And it is only the Catholic Church that has jurisdiction over those marriages, with due regard for the competence of civil authority concerning the merely civil effects. No one other than the Church has the power or authority to change ecclesiastical laws.

Unity and Indissolubility

Unity of marriage signifies that the *covenant* established is between one man and one woman: the husband cannot marry another woman during the lifetime of his wife, nor can the wife marry another

36. This section (pp. 29–34) is excerpted from Rev. James Socias, *Marriage Is Love Forever*, Princeton, N.J.: Scepter Publications, 1994.

man during the lifetime of her husband. *Polygamy*—having more than one spouse at the same time—is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women, who in Matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and, therefore unique and exclusive. *Indissolubility* refers to the fact that the bond of sacramental marriage cannot be broken except by the death of either the husband or the wife.

Consent

Matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman, in an irrevocable covenant, mutually give and accept each other, declaring their willingness to welcome children and to educate them. Consent must be a free act of the will of each of the contracting parties, without coercion or serious fear arising from external circumstances. To be free means:

- *To be acting without constraint.*
- *To be unimpeded by natural or ecclesiastical law.*

Only those capable of giving valid matrimonial consent can get married: Matrimony is created through the consent of the parties—consent legitimately manifested between persons who, according to law, are capable of giving that consent.

Conditions for a Valid Marriage

1. The contracting parties must be capable, according to Church law, of giving matrimonial consent. Before Matrimony is celebrated, it must be evident that no impediment stands in the way of its valid and licit (lawful) celebration.

The right to contract marriage presupposes that one can marry, and one intends to authentically celebrate marriage, that is, to do so in the truth of its essence as it is taught by the Church.... The 'ius connubii,' therefore, is not being denied where it is evident that the premises for

its exercise are not present, that is, if the requested capacity to wed is manifestly lacking, or an objective is sought that is contrary to the natural reality of marriage.*

2. The consent given by the parties must be deliberate, fully voluntary, free, mutual, and public. Therefore, the following are incapable of contracting marriage:

- Persons who lack sufficient use of reason.
- Persons who suffer from grave lack of discretion of judgment concerning essential matrimonial rights and duties that are to be mutually given and accepted.
- Persons who, because of serious psychic illness, cannot assume the essential obligations of Matrimony.

3. The consent must be *legitimately manifested in canonical form*, in the presence of an authorized priest or deacon and two witnesses. Canonical form does not oblige non-Catholics when they marry other non-Catholics, but only Catholics—even if only one of the two parties is Catholic—who have not left the Church by a formal act. *The priest or deacon who assists at the celebration of a marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives them the blessing of the Church. The presence of the Church's minister, as well as that of the witnesses, visibly expresses the fact that marriage is an ecclesial reality.*

Age Requirement

As a condition for marriage, the Church requires that a man has completed his sixteenth year (one's sixteenth year is completed the day after one's sixteenth birth-

* Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota for the Inauguration of the Juridical Year, January 29, 2009.

day) and that a woman has completed her fourteenth year of age (one's fourteenth year of age is completed the day after one's fourteenth birthday). These ages are the minima for validity. There may be civil laws, as well, regulating the minimum age for each state and country, but failure to comply with these laws does not invalidate marriage in the eyes of the Church.

Invalid Marriages

Marriage is permanent, because God established it so from the very beginning. The indissolubility of marriage is for the good of husband and wife, their children, and human society as a whole. The civil government has no power to dissolve a valid marriage—even if the marriage is between non-Catholics.

The government can dissolve only the civil aspects of marriage, such as ownership of property, custody of the children, etc. *Even when civil divorce is allowed by the country's law*, marriage, in God's eyes, still exists.

The Church does not have the power to dissolve a valid, sacramental marriage that has been *consummated*. She may declare a marriage *null and void* only upon investigation and on evidence that the marriage did not exist from the very beginning. The reasons could be one of the following:

- Lack of fully *voluntary and free consent*.
- Some deficiency in the *form of the marriage celebration*.
- The presence of an *impediment* that makes a marriage invalid.

The *declaration of nullity* (so-called *annulment*) is a very important decision of an ecclesiastical court. A very careful investigation has to be made by the court before that conclusion can be reached, ensuring that no valid marriage is declared *null and void* by mistake.

Mixed Marriages

Marriages between a Catholic and a baptized Christian who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church are called *mixed marriages*. For *mixed marriages*, permission (not dispensation) from the local ordinary (usually the bishop) is required for validity. Marriages between Catholics and unbaptized persons (*disparity of cult*) are invalid unless a dispensation from the local ordinary is granted. All this presupposes that these marriages are celebrated with all other necessary conditions fulfilled.

The local bishop may grant permission or dispensation for such marriages on the following conditions:

- The Catholic party declares that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of falling away from the faith and makes a sincere promise to do all in his or her power to have all the children baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church.
- The other party is to be informed at an appropriate time of these promises that the Catholic person has to make. It is important that the other person be truly aware of the commitments and obligations of the Catholic spouse.
- Both persons are to be instructed with respect to the essential ends and properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either party.
- The man and woman should *marry in the Catholic Church*. The canonical form (Church ceremony with an authorized Catholic priest or deacon and at least two other witnesses present) is to be followed. When there are serious difficulties, the local bishop may give a dispensation and allow another form which is public (such as a civil ceremony) to be followed. It is never allowed, how-

ever, to have the Catholic priest or deacon and a non-Catholic minister, rabbi, or public official, each performing his or her own rite, asking for the consent of the parties. Likewise, it is forbidden to have another religious marriage ceremony before or after the Catholic ceremony for giving or receiving the matrimonial consent. Marriage consent is given only once.

Worthy Reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony

Once these requirements for a valid marriage are fulfilled, some other conditions are needed for the *worthy* reception of the *sacrament* of Matrimony:

- *Baptism.* Both parties must be baptized persons.
- *Rectitude of intention.* Being carried away by emotions or momentary passions should be avoided. Premarital pregnancy is not a sufficient reason to marry someone, as that could involve an added mistake.
- *Spiritual preparation.* One should be in the state of grace. The Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist are strongly recommended as immediate preparation.
- *Confirmation.* Catholics should have previously received the Sacrament of Confirmation. This Sacrament should be received before marriage, unless grave difficulties stand in the way.
- *Knowledge of the duties of married life.* Such duties include mutual fidelity of the spouses until death, and care for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the children sent by God.
- *Obedience to the marriage laws of the Church.*

INDULGENCES³⁷

Definition

- “An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins, whose guilt is forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful obtains under certain and clearly defined conditions through the intervention of the Church, which, as the minister of Redemption, dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the expiatory works of Christ and the saints.”
- “An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.”

Explanation

- An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin. It may be applied to the living or the dead: *through indulgences the faithful can obtain—for themselves and also for the souls in purgatory—the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin.* Because we and the faithful departed now being purified are members of the same communion of saints, one way in which we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due to their sins may be remitted.

37. Cf. CCC 1471–1479; CIC, 992–997; St. Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, 1967, Libreria Editrice Vaticana; *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum: Normæ et Concessiones*, 1999, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Requirements

"A plenary indulgence can be acquired only once in the course of a day; a partial indulgence can be acquired multiple times. The faithful however can obtain the plenary indulgence at the hour of death, even if they have already gained one on the same day."

"In order to be capable of gaining indulgences one must be baptized, not excommunicated, and in the state of grace at least at the completion of the prescribed works. To gain an indulgence, one must have at least the general intention of doing so and must carry out the enjoined works at the stated time and in due fashion, according to the sense of the grant."

"To gain a plenary indulgence, in addition to excluding all attachment to sin, even venial sin, it is necessary to perform the indulgenced work and fulfill the following three conditions: sacramental confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff."

"A single sacramental confession suffices for gaining several plenary indulgences; but Holy Communion must be received and prayer for the intention of the Holy Father must be recited for the gaining of each plenary indulgence."

"The three conditions may be fulfilled several days before or after the performance of the prescribed work; it is, however, fitting that Communion be received and the prayer for the intention of the Holy Father be said on the same day the work is performed."

"If the full disposition is lacking, or if the work and the three prescribed conditions are not fulfilled... the indulgence will only be partial."

Plenary Indulgence

A *plenary indulgence* is granted to the faithful who:

- Visit the Blessed Sacrament for adoration lasting at least a half hour.

- Visit a parish church:
 - On the solemnity of its titular feast.
 - On August 2, the day of the “Portiuncula indulgence.”
 - On All Souls’ Day (applicable to the dead only).On these visits one should recite the *Our Father* and the *Creed* and fulfill the three requirements (Confession, Communion, and prayer for the pope’s intentions).
- Read the Sacred Scriptures for at least a half hour.
- Make the pious Way of the Cross.
- Recite the Marian Rosary devoutly in a church, oratory, or in a family.
- Receive the Apostolic Blessing at the hour of death.

Partial Indulgence

One of the faithful who, being at least inwardly contrite, performs a work carrying with it a partial indulgence receives through the Church the remission of temporal punishment. “A partial indulgence is granted to the Christian faithful who:

- while carrying out their duties and enduring the hardships of life, raise their minds in humble trust to God and make, at least mentally, some pious invocation.
- led by the spirit of faith, give compassionately of themselves or of their good to serve their brothers in need.
- in a spirit of penance, voluntarily abstain from something that is licit for and pleasing to them.
- in the particular circumstances of daily life, voluntarily give explicit witness to their faith before others.”

SACRAMENTALS³⁸

Sacramentals are sacred signs by which spiritual effects, especially, are signified and are obtained by the intercession of the Church. "They prepare the faithful to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify various circumstances of life."

"Among the sacramentals, blessings occupy an important place. They include praise of God for his works and gifts, as well as the Church's intercession for people, that they may be able to use God's gifts according to the spirit of the Gospel." Besides blessings, other sacramentals are: the Sign of the Cross, use of holy water and the religious articles mentioned above.

CARDINAL VIRTUES³⁹

A virtue is a habitual disposition to do good. Among all the virtues, there are four that play a pivotal role and accordingly are called cardinal.

- *Prudence*, which disposes the practical reason to discern in every circumstance one's true good and to choose the right means for achieving it.
- *Justice*, which consists in the firm and constant will to give God and neighbor their due.
- *Fortitude*, which ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good.
- *Temperance*, which moderates the attraction of the pleasures of the senses and provides balance in the use of created goods.

38. Cf. CCC, 1677–1678.

39. Cf. CCC, 1805–1807, 1835–1837.

*THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES*⁴⁰

The theological virtues dispose Christians to live in a close relationship with the Holy Trinity. These virtues have God for their origin, their motive, and their object—God known by faith, God hoped in and loved for his own sake.

Faith

- “Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us and that holy Church proposes for our belief because he is truth itself.”
- “The gift of faith remains in one who has not sinned against it. But “faith apart from works is dead”: when it is deprived of hope and love, faith does not fully unite the believer to Christ and does not make him a living member of his body.”
- “The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it. . . . Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation.”

Hope

- “Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.”
- “The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness that God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire a men’s activities and purifies them, so as to order

40. Cf. CCC, 1814–1829, 1842–1844.

them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity."

- "Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus' preaching in the proclamation of the Beatitudes."

Charity

- "Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God."
- "Jesus makes charity the *new commandment*. . . . 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.' The Lord asks us to love as he does, even our *enemies*, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ himself."
- "Charity is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues. The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which 'binds everything together in perfect harmony.'"
- "The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son, as children responding to the love of him who 'first loved us.'"

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT⁴¹

- *Wisdom* is the fruit of perfect charity that strengthens our loving knowledge of God and all that leads to and comes from him. It gives us knowledge of the Divine Life of the Blessed Trinity and allows us to enjoy the presence of God.
- *Understanding* perfects our perception of the mysteries of the Faith, enabling us to penetrate more deeply into the divine truths revealed by God. It enables us to appreciate the fullness of the Catholic Faith.
- *Counsel* helps us judge promptly, correctly, and according to the will of God. It enables us to wisely choose those actions that will be for the glory of God and for our own salvation. Flowing from the gifts of wisdom and understanding, counsel perfects the virtue of prudence and helps us know what we should, or should not do, in those situations that require a moral decision.
- *Fortitude* makes us steadfast in the Faith, constant in struggle, and faithful in perseverance. It gives us the strength and courage to profess and defend the truths of the Catholic Faith, to endure long and trying difficulties, and to complete the tasks we have undertaken in the service of God.
- *Knowledge* enables us to discover the supernatural truth contained in God's creation and the path that we should follow in our journey to heaven. It permits us to live a life of detachment, using created things as God intended.
- *Piety* teaches us the meaning of divine filiation, the joyful supernatural awareness of being children of God, and brothers and sisters of all mankind. It leads us to a true love for God as our merciful Father and for all human beings as his children.
- *Fear of the Lord* deepens our sense of sovereign respect in the presence of an all-powerful and loving God. It leads us to know the evil of sin and, therefore, to detest it, and impresses upon our hearts a spirit of adoration and a profound and sincere humility.

FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT⁴²

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit are those supernatural acts, performed with peace and joy, that flow from the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Their designation as fruits signifies that they are

41. Cf. CCC, 768, 798–801, 1830.

42. Cf. CCC, 1832; cf. Gal 5:22–23.

performed with pleasure and easiness—all difficulties disappearing in light of the pleasure and satisfaction that result from the good accomplished. Scripture lists the Fruits of the Holy Spirit as charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.

MORTAL AND VENIAL SINS⁴³

“Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in the Scripture, became part of the apostolic tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience.”

“*Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart” of the sinner. It requires “a new initiative of God’s mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the sacrament of Reconciliation. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met.”

- *Grave matter* is specified by divine law (Ten Commandments) and the ultimate end of man.
- “*Full knowledge* [is] knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God’s law. . . . Unintentional ignorance can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense. But no one is deemed to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, which are written in the conscience of every man.”
- “*Complete consent* [is] a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin. . . . The promptings of feelings and passions can diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense, as can external pressures or pathological disorders. Sin committed through malice, by deliberate choice of evil, is the gravest.”

“*Venial sin* allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.”

43. Cf. CCC, 1854–1860; cf. 1 Jn 16–17.

CAPITAL SINS AND OPPOSED VIRTUES⁴⁴

The Capital Sins can be classified according to the virtues they oppose. They are called “capital” because they engender other sins, other vices.

Capital Sins

- Pride
- Covetousness
- Lust
- Anger
- Gluttony
- Envy
- Sloth

Virtues Opposed

- Humility
- Liberality
- Chastity
- Meekness
- Temperance
- Brotherly love
- Diligence

SINS AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT⁴⁵

“Whoever *blasphemes against the Holy Spirit* never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.’ There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss.” This sin blocks the person’s route to Christ, and the sinner puts himself outside the range of God’s forgiveness. In this sense, the sins against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven.

SINS THAT CRY TO HEAVEN⁴⁶

Catechetical tradition recalls that there are “*sins that cry to heaven*”: the blood of Abel; the sin of the Sodomites; ignoring the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt and that of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan; injustice to the wage earner.

44. Cf. CCC, 1866–1867.

45. Cf. CCC, 1864, 1866.

46. Cf. CCC, 1867.

CHRISTIAN PRAYER

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.⁴⁷ *Prayer and Christian life are inseparable, for they concern the same love and the same renunciation, proceeding from love.*⁴⁸

What is prayer?

"[Prayer] is commonly held to be a conversation. In a conversation there are always an 'I' and a 'thou' or 'you.' In this case the 'Thou' is with a capital 'T'. If at first the 'I' seems to be the most important element in prayer, prayer teaches that the situation is actually different. *The 'Thou' is more important, because our prayer begins with God.*...

*"In prayer, then, the true protagonist is God. The protagonist is Christ, who constantly frees creation from slavery to corruption and leads it toward liberty, for the glory of the children of God. The protagonist is the Holy Spirit, who 'comes to the aid of our weakness.' We begin to pray, believing that it is our own initiative that compels us to do so. Instead, we learn that it is always God's initiative within us, just as Saint Paul has written. This initiative restores in us our true humanity; it restores in us our unique dignity."*⁴⁹

Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ: to get to know him, love him, and united to him. We learn what prayer is by reviewing the life of Christ. He taught us how to pray. When Jesus prayed to his Father, he was already teaching us how to pray.⁵⁰

47. St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.* 3, 24; in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Græca* (=PG), 94, 1089C, Paris, 1857–1866.

48. Cf. CCC, 2745.

49. CTH, 16–17.

50. Cf. CCC, 2607, 2708.

"The Church invites the faithful to regular prayer: daily prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours, Sunday Eucharist, the feasts of the liturgical year."⁵¹

Types of Prayer

"Prayer in the events of each day and each moment is one of the secrets of the kingdom revealed to 'little children,' to the servants of Christ, to the poor of the Beatitudes. It is right and good to pray so that the coming of the kingdom of justice and peace may influence the march of history, but it is just as important to bring the help of prayer into humble, everyday situations; all forms of prayer can be the leaven to which the Lord compares the kingdom."⁵²

"The Christian tradition comprises three major expressions of the life of prayer:

- "*Vocal prayer*, founded on the union of body and soul in human nature, associates the body with the interior prayer of the heart, following Christ's example of praying to his Father and teaching the Our Father to his disciples.
- "*Meditation* is a prayerful quest engaging thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. Its goal is to make our own, in faith, the subject considered, by confronting it with the reality of our own life.
- "*Contemplative prayer* is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery."⁵³

51. CCC, 2720.

52. CCC, 2660.

53. Cf. CCC, 2721–2724.

The Battle of Prayer⁵⁴

The battle of prayer is inseparable from the necessary “spiritual battle” to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ: we pray as we live, because we live as we pray.

The principal difficulties that we find are:

- We “don’t have the time.” Prayer is considered as an occupation incompatible with all the other things we have to do.

The remedy: “Make the time” for your personal prayer, knowing that nothing could excuse your failing to do so.

- We “get distracted.” Concentration becomes really difficult and we easily give up.

The remedy: Turn your heart back to God, offering him the distractions with humility, without discouragement.

- We “feel dry.” It seems that the heart is separated from God, with no taste for thoughts, memories, and feelings, even spiritual ones.

The remedy: Remember that “unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

There are two frequent temptations that threaten prayer:

- Lack of faith. Prayer is not the first priority.

The remedy: Ask our Lord with a humble heart, “Lord, increase my faith.”

- Acedia. A form of depression stemming from lax ascetical practice, that leads to discouragement.

The remedy: Trust God more and hold fast in constancy.

54. Cf. CCC, 2752, 2755.

POSTURE FOR PRAYER

One should pray with a posture that expresses the dignity of prayer. The gestures, attitude, appearance, behavior, and manners of those who pray should also convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of conversing with God.

The signs, symbols, and gestures that people use in prayer help them turn their hearts and minds toward God. Common postures and signs include the following:

- The *Sign of the Cross* is a symbol of the faith and salvation in Christ. Christians have used this sign since the early Church to recall Christ's Passion and acknowledge faith in the Blessed Trinity.
- *Kneeling* is a sign of humbleness of heart, penitence, and sorrow for sins. It is a posture of obedience to and adoration of God, "[whom] only shall you serve."⁵⁵
- *Genuflection*, a momentary kneeling on one or both knees, is also a sign of humbleness of heart, penitence, and sorrow for sins. It also expresses faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁵⁶
- *Bowing the body* is a sign of profound reverence and humility before God.⁵⁷
- *Standing* is a sign of joy and adoration of God. It expresses freedom from slavery to sin through the risen Christ.
- *Sitting upright* is a sign of respect and attention. It shows receptiveness to the Word of God, like

55. Mt 4:10; Lk 4:8.

56. Cf. CCC 1387,

57. Cf. Phil 2:10.

"Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching."⁵⁸

- *Bowing the head* is a sign of reverence. It may be done when hearing the name of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity.

PRAYING AS A FAMILY

"The family that prays together stays together."⁵⁹

Parents have a special responsibility to be the first teachers of the faith to their children.⁶⁰ One of the first things parents teach their children are basic prayers such as the Our Father and the Hail Mary. This should be the first step in teaching them how to pray and how to make prayer a regular part of their lives. Incorporating prayer into the family's schedule thus becomes one of the most essential roles of any parent.

Praying as a family builds up family life. A family that responds to God's call to pray invites him to share in the entirety of family life, both good and bad. The family becomes comfortable turning to the heavenly Father, whether in giving thanks, petitioning him, or in any other situation of life. A family's identity as a domestic church will be strengthened through prayer.

"Family prayer has for its very own object family life itself, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to His call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, births and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures,

58. Lk 10:39.

59. Rev. Patrick Peyton, founder of the Family Rosary Crusade.

60. Cf. CCC 2223.

separations and homecomings, important and far reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc.—all of these mark God’s loving intervention in the family’s history. They should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven. The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God’s unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer.”⁶¹

Prayer is vital to the spiritual health of a family, because as the members grow closer to Christ, they grow closer to one another. Prayer is essential “so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father.”⁶² Each member of the family has a role during family prayer. The father of the family is the priest of this “domestic church” and has the duty to be a strong example and to lead family prayer. The mother is the heart of the family, whose devotion to prayer ensures a prayerful atmosphere in the home. Children from a young age should participate fully in family prayer, perhaps leading decades of the family Rosary or including their intentions in the family’s intercessory prayers for others.

61. FC 59.

62. CCC 2558.

UNDERSTANDING SICKNESS, SUFFERING, AND DEATH

A visit, even a brief one, can be of great consolation to someone who is sick. If there were a formula or a certain collection of words that would allay all the fears and bring total peace and comfort to anyone who was suffering, it would have been discovered millennia ago and we would all learn it as part of growing up. As it stands, no such thing exists. So, we need to use some common sense. It is highly unlikely that the patient is going to look back on your visit remembering the great words or wisdom and consolation that you imparted. They will, however, always remember that you took the time to come and see them.

Herein lies the key to visiting the sick, the dying, and the families of those who have experienced the death of a loved one: You do not need to have all the right words to say because they do not exist. Your concern and your presence; that you took the time and effort to visit the sick or attend a funeral vigil (wake) service says it all. This should be a tremendous relief for us when we are in these uncomfortable circumstances. Send for a priest to confer the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick (Confession; Holy Eucharist) for persons with serious sickness or suffering, (Anointing and *Viaticum*) for the dying.

Our conversation with the sick, suffering or dying will depend on our relationship with that person and that person's degree of practiced faith. If we are good friends or close family members, we can broach the very profound and mysterious aspects of suffering and death. We can ask if the sick person has made his peace with God.

If the person is not practicing the faith, prayer can be of great help to them, but we have to read the situation carefully. Will a non-practicing Catholic or non-religious person be comforted or offended or even threatened by our offer for prayer? Again, qui-

etly listening to the sick person will probably tell you everything you need to know. Most people most of the time are at least aware of these delicate decisions. Prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance will never fail.

How to Visit a Sick Family Member or Friend

It can be a challenging and trying time when a family member or friend falls ill. These suggestions are designed to help families confront sickness spiritually as well as emotionally.

1. Visiting the sick is one of the Corporal Works of Mercy that is recommended by the Church, and Sunday is a traditional day to carry out acts of Christian piety; to do good works; and to perform humble service for the sick, the infirm, and the elderly (cf. CCC 2186).
2. When a family member or friend contracts a serious illness or grows infirm with old age, be sure to send for a priest. If possible, have the entire family together during the Anointing of the Sick, Confession and Viaticum, and other rites and prayers. Remember the dignity of the Sacraments, and be sure to tidy and prepare the room before the priest arrives.
3. When visiting a sick family member or friend, help him or her receive this sickness from the hands of our heavenly Father. Help him or her see suffering as a loving invitation to grow in love and prepare more earnestly for death, Judgment, and the next life.
4. Help a sick family member or friend practice the virtues of patience and submission to the will of God. Guide him or her to a deeper repentance and to offer sufferings to God. God knows more than you may realize.

5. If a sick family member or friend is not in the habit of prayer, gently guide him or her to begin praying. If he or she has been away from Penance and the other Sacraments, don't be pushy, but do be patient and persistent, as this may require much time and many visits. Never lose hope of anyone's salvation, and never give up.
6. Encourage a sick family member or friend give thanks for the blessings that he or she enjoys.
7. Give tactful, frank, and timely information about the gravity of the illness or condition. Do not flatter him or her with false hopes of recovery.
8. Prepare for a visit thoughtfully. Make the best use of the time available; visit briefly but frequently. Keep the number of visitors to a minimum; let conversation move as often as possible from worldly to spiritual matters.
9. Offer yourself by helping a sick family member or friend to settle his or her temporal affairs and attend to practical details—so he or she can focus on spiritual matters.
10. Assist a sick family member or friend meditate on Our Lord's Passion and other scenes from his life, especially in the Rosary. Pray it as often as possible, and bring a favorite Rosary, a Bible, a prayer book, and other objects of pious devotion such as holy cards, medals, etc. These can also be a source of comfort and consolation.
11. Remember that if a sick family member or friend is unconscious, he or she may be able to hear, so vocal prayer is important. Speak directly with great love, and never say anything that would not be said in his or her hearing.

12. Do not be afraid to listen to a sick family member or friend, even if he or she confides awkward intimacies or broaches controversial topics. Asking open-ended questions that allow the suffering person the chance to say what is on his mind will go far in bringing him some peace. Offer a hand to hold, and express love for him or her—or just sit in silence.

SOME ASPIRATIONS

To the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, p.74.

To the Blessed Virgin Mary

- Pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death!
- Sweet Heart of Mary, be my salvation.
- O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.
- O Mary, virgin Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.
- Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of my death.

Prayer for the Moment of Death

- Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!
- Lord, my God, from this moment on I accept with a good will, as something coming from your hand, whatever kind of death you want to send me, with all its anguish, pain, and sorrow.
- Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!

DECALOGUE FOR A HAPPY SPIRITUAL LIFE⁶³

1. In my life, I am faced with this choice: Do I follow the “I”, or do I follow God? If I want to follow God, I will need to seek his guidance every day, about everything in my life, knowing that He is my Father.

Suggestion: Set aside some time every day for mental prayer—a conversation with God.

2. Do I want to be honest, to do what is right, following my conscience? If so, then I need to understand, what is good and what is bad, for me and for others. I want to have a well-formed conscience, that helps me make the right decisions. Christian morality places Christ, in the center of our moral decision-making. Our conscience should be formed, based on the teachings and life of Christ.

Suggestions: Become familiar with the moral teachings of the Church. Do a simple examination of conscience (3 minutes) at the end of the day.

3. Do I really want to be myself? If I do, I cannot pretend to be something or someone I’m not, just to fit in and be accepted by others. So I always want to be sincere and truthful and live with integrity, even if doing so requires making a big sacrifice—I have to renounce many things, big and small to be true to myself.

Suggestion: Make 2 or 3 personal resolutions that will help you to live the courage to be sincere and say always the truth.

4. Do I want to discover the plan of God for me? If so, I will need the help of the Holy Spirit to discover what God is calling me to do and what is His mission for me in my life.

Suggestion: Meet with a spiritual director for guidance twice a month.

63. (St. Josemaria Escriva, *Friends of God*.)

5. Do I want to make good use of the gifts and talents God has given me in order to serve Him and give Him glory? If so, I need to organize my time and efforts.

Suggestion: Set specific goals for the next day, week, and year. Develop a lifestyle—good habits included—to help to achieve those goals.

6. Do I wish to be accountable by making my days and my work the best I can, out of love for God and others, thereby imitating the life of Jesus? If so, then I need to make a habit of familiarizing myself with Jesus' life.

Suggestion: Read and reflect on the Gospels for 5 to 10 minutes a day.

7. Do I want to persevere in all the things I want to achieve for God? If so, then I need to be able to accept my own limitations and be patient with myself when I seem to fail. I need to be determined to begin again cheerfully, offering to God the efforts I have to make.

Suggestion: Go to Confession regularly, at least once a month, to receive the graces to be humble and to make changes in my life.

8. Do I want to make others happy and help them enjoy a good spiritual life? If so, then I should love and serve them and, as well, bring them closer to God by my example, by Works of Mercy, and by bringing them to the Sacrament of Confession.

Suggestion: Always ask God's help at the beginning of the day, resolving to act with the intention of serving God and others, and making a point to do some corporal or spiritual work of mercy each day.

9. Do I want to live a life of priorities, avoiding laziness, and making decisions with freedom of spirit? If so, I need to simplify my life and give each activity its proper place—always keeping God first.

Suggestion: Make and keep a plan of life for every day of the week.

- 10.** Do I want to receive the grace to keep my spiritual life in good shape? If so, I have to pray to the Holy Spirit every day, to accept challenges with a sporting spirit, care for others, and go to Mass frequently (and always on Sunday).

Suggestion: Offer the day to God through the Blessed Virgin Mary as soon as you wake up, and finish the day with 3 *Hail Mary's*.

