

What Is Faith?

Faith has many meanings. It is a rich, inexhaustible concept which describes how we relate to the world, to other people, and to God.

Here are several descriptions of faith. Those in the first column could apply to any human relationship; those in the second more accurately refer to our relationship with God.

Rank each description according to how well you think it captures what faith is about. Then, using your favorite descriptions, compose your own definition of faith.

Faith — General Meaning

- ___ Faith is believing what you know “ain’t so.”
- ___ Faith is a blind leap into the unknown.
- ___ Faith is trusting in another.
- ___ Faith is taking a risk.
- ___ Faith is admitting there are questions to ask.
- ___ Faith is saying “yes” to life.

Faith—Religious Concept

- ___ Faith is allowing God to care for you.
- ___ Faith is saying “yes” to God’s invitation.
- ___ Faith is a journey to God.
- ___ Faith is accepting Jesus.
- ___ Faith is responding to God’s presence.
- ___ “What is faith except to believe what you do not see?”
—St Augustine

Your personal definition of faith:

Faith is _____ .

Catholic Beliefs Survey

Here is a list of some of the most important beliefs held by Catholics. As you begin this course on Catholic faith, where do you stand on each of these? Decide by blackening the circle in the appropriate column.

- 1— I firmly believe this.
- 2— I believe this.
- 3— I am not sure if I believe this.
- 4— I need to know more about this topic before I can say whether or not I believe it.

	1	2	3	4
1. God is one.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. God has made all that is seen and unseen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Jesus Christ is God. He lived as a man, suffered, and died for our sins, and rose to glory.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Jesus Christ lives among us now.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit whose power can be experienced in our daily lives.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. God is a Trinity of love.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Jesus Christ founded the Roman Catholic Church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The Holy Spirit guides the church through the pope and the bishops in communion with him.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The church has the right and the duty to teach in the areas of faith and morals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The Bible is the inspired word of God.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Every Catholic has the duty to read and study the Bible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. There are seven sacraments.
- *Baptism* unites Catholics to the body of Christ.
 - *Reconciliation* celebrates God's forgiveness.
 - I can receive the risen Lord in *eucharist*.
 - *Marriage* is a unique way to experience the life of Christ.
14. The greatest commandment is to love God above everything.
15. The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves.
16. Prayer should play an important role in a Catholic's life.
17. Every Catholic must serve others, especially the poor and outcast.
18. Every Catholic must share the gospel with others.
19. Every Catholic must honor Mary in a special way and give respect to the saints.
20. Every Catholic must seek guidance from the church in matters of morality.
21. Learning about our Catholic faith is a life-long obligation.
22. There is an afterlife.

23. The belief I am most sure about is: _____

24. I believe this because: _____

25. The topic I most want to learn about in this course is:

Atheists, Agnostics, “Practical Atheists”

Atheists. However few, there are *atheists* who deny God’s existence. Their reasons vary. Some claim if there were a God, we could prove God’s existence beyond a shadow of a doubt. Because we cannot do so to everyone’s satisfaction, they deny that there is a God. Others—atheistic humanists—maintain that belief in God degrades what it means to be human. For them, intelligent humans are the peak of the evolving universe and God is an idea dreamed up by those in power to keep the ordinary folk in line.

Still other atheists claim that it is impossible to reconcile the notion of God with the evil in the world. Their question has to do with how a powerful being could possibly tolerate the immense evils of the world. Since they cannot answer this question, they deny that any Ultimate Being exists. Also, *atheistic materialists* (like Karl Marx) deny the existence of any spiritual reality. They only believe in what they can see, taste, touch, smell, or hear. The philosophy spawned by Marx—atheistic communism—enslaved millions of people during the twentieth century.

Agnostics. The cousins of the atheists are *agnostics*. Their name comes from the Greek for “don’t know.” They claim that we cannot know *for sure* if there is a God or not. For them, “God’s existence makes no practical difference in their lives. Though they claim not to take a stand on the issue, in reality they have decided *not* to commit themselves to God and live under divine sovereignty. Someone once amusingly said of agnostics that they pray like this: “Oh God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul.”

Practical atheists. Related to atheists and agnostics, practical atheists are self-proclaimed believers who claim to believe in God yet are indifferent to spiritual realities.

✧ discuss ✧

1. Think of examples of recent films you have seen where characters hold one or another of these positions.
2. Which do you think is a greater threat to Christian belief: agnosticism or practical atheism? Explain.

God in Your Life

Your own personal experience can teach you much about God. Reflect on the following topics and then see if you can come up with a concept of God that your experience reveals. Some examples are given for each category. Circle the ones that apply or write your own.

1. Briefly describe something you do that you enjoy very much:

What does this experience reveal to you about God?

God is . . .

joy happiness freedom _____.

2. Briefly describe someone you know personally whom you respect.

This person reveals that God is . . .

loving generous sensitive _____.

3. Briefly describe a scene from nature that fills you with wonder:

This scene reveals that God is . . .

awesome immense beautiful _____.

discuss

As a class, share an experience of any of the following which may have revealed to you something about God:

- a. events or people
- b. a Bible reading
- c. personal prayer
- d. something in creation (rainbow, sunset), a newborn baby, the precision of mathematical formulas
- e. the reality of love shown in a kiss or an embrace

Getting to Know Jesus

People reveal themselves in both actions and words. Here are four different scenes, one from each gospel, that help reveal more about the human Jesus. Read each passage. Summarize what the scenes reveal about Jesus.

Matthew 21:12–17

Mark 5:25–34

Luke 7:36–50

John 11:17–44

Studying a Parable of Jesus

A parable is a simple, down-to-earth story with an unexpected twist. Jesus used parables to help present the good news of God's salvation. His parables also challenge you to hear the gospel in a new and fresh way.

Here is a list of some of Jesus' parables. Choose one and complete the following study guide.

Talents (Mt 25:14–30)

Pharisee and Tax Collector (Lk 18:9–14)

Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11–32)

Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37)

Merciless Official (Mt 18:21–35)

Tenants (Mk 12:1–12)

Wily Manager (Lk 16:1–8)

Wedding Banquet (Lk 14:16–24)

Laborers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16)

Weeds (Mt 13:24–30)

Seed (Mk 4:1–20)

Describe the setting: _____

To whom is the parable addressed? _____

Did people understand the parable? _____

Explain their reaction to it: _____

Explain the meaning of the parable as you understand it:

What does the message of the parable mean to your own life?

Give the parable another title: _____

✧ journal ✧

Rewrite the parable. Use a modern setting, but preserve its message and meaning.

Values and Jesus

Rank the following items (1–11) by how much time you spend thinking about them and how important they are to you.

- ___ your relationship to members of the opposite sex
- ___ your future
- ___ your popularity
- ___ how others treat you
- ___ mistakes you have made
- ___ your relationship with God
- ___ your relationship with your parents
- ___ money
- ___ your relationship with your friends
- ___ your success or failure in school, sports or other activities
- ___ your personal appearance

What Jesus ranked as important is contained in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5—7. Read the text from scripture. Then evaluate each item above to see which would be important to Jesus.

discuss

1. What is of most value to Jesus?
2. In light of Jesus' teaching, how would you rank the items on the list?
3. What are some societal pressures that keep us from following Jesus' teaching?

Building up the Church

You can help build up the church by using your own special gifts. What are your personal “body-building” gifts? How are you special? Here is a list of nine Christian virtues. Check three that are most often present in your life. Then respond to the statement that follows.

Prudent (You “look before you leap.”)

Honest (You are not deceitful.)

Dependable (People can count on you.)

Patient (You don’t demand perfection in others.)

Forgiving (You don’t hold grudges.)

Empathetic (You can “feel for” another.)

Loyal (You stand by your friends.)

Helpful (You contribute time and effort when a job needs to be done.)

Humble (You praise others, yet you are not boastful.)

Add two other virtues that you believe are essential to building up a community. Describe each. Check them if they apply to you.

_____ (_____)

_____ (_____)

Describe a time when you felt you accomplished work for God and the church.

You Are the Living Church

You, as a member of the church, are an active reminder of Jesus' presence in the world. With a small group, complete the following activity to demonstrate your commitment to the work of Christ. Do these steps in order:

- A. *Newspaper*. Examine articles in the local newspaper to help determine the most pressing social needs in your community.
- B. *Priorities*. Discuss and then list what your group perceives to be the three most critical issues.
- C. *Research*. Select one of the issues and find out what, if anything, the church teaches about it. Consult the Bible, biblical dictionaries and commentaries, catechisms, the *Documents of Vatican II*, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, and articles from recent Catholic magazines and journals. Use the *Catholic Periodical and Literature Index* to help you locate specific articles.
- D. *Further Research*. Determine what is already being done in your local area to solve the problem associated with your group's issue. You might research the efforts of local governmental agencies and charitable organizations.
- E. *Specific Action*. Discuss what action your group could take on this issue.
- F. *Christian Witness*. Share each of the results of the preceding steps with the class. Use a chart to help with your presentation:

Specific Issue / Problem	Church Teaching	What is Being Done Now? By Whom?	What We Can Do to Help

Church Organization

Like any institution, the church is organized so it can accomplish its mission. Listed below are the various designations of the church's organizational structure. Choose one designation and prepare a report based on the questions asked.

The *pope* is the head of the church. He is elected by the cardinals in a closed session. He is the supreme teacher, lawgiver, and shepherd who oversees the work of the church.

- Detail the election process for a pope.
- What is the Roman Curia? How does it help the pope do his work?
- Prepare a short biography of one of the twentieth-century popes.

Bishops are appointed by the pope, usually after consultation. They are the chief teachers and lawgivers in a diocese. They confer the sacraments of confirmation and holy orders. *Cardinals* are bishops who have been given the special task of electing a new pope.

- What are some characteristics of a good bishop?
- What is a deanery? a diocese? an archdiocese?
- Who is/are the bishop(s) in your diocese?
- List the names of the cardinals in the United States. (Consult a recent *Catholic Almanac*.)

Pastors are appointed by the bishop with help from a diocesan personnel board. The pastor is the chief administrator of a parish.

- What are some characteristics of a good pastor?
- Interview a pastor of a local parish. Ask him to share the greatest needs, challenges, and rewards of his job.

Law and Morality

It is impossible to create civil laws to regulate every aspect of human behavior. Yet society recognizes the need to pass some laws for the sake of the common good.

Below is a list of activities. First, place an X in Column A by the activities you think are morally wrong. Second, for those items you've marked, decide whether there should be civil laws to regulate those activities. If you think yes, then mark an X in Column B. Finally, go back over the items you marked as morally wrong and rank them from the most important (1) to the least important (8) as a *moral* issue.

	A	B	
ITEM	Morally Wrong	Should Be a Law	Rank
1. Engaging in homosexual activity			
2. Selling "recreational" drugs			
3. Underage drinking of alcohol			
4. Prostitution			
5. Selling pornography			
6. Performing abortions			
7. Euthanasia			
8. Tax avoidance schemes			

✧ **discuss** ✧

1. Whose responsibility is it to determine the morality of these and other issues in society?
2. How can you respond to the claim that society is forcing its morality on others by passing laws to regulate the actions of individuals?

Case Studies

A. Mortal Sins: Yes or No?

Check any of the following sins which, in your judgment, involve *serious matter* and would be considered mortally sinful if engaged in with consent of the will and knowledge. Discuss reasons for your choices.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> fornication (pre-marital sexual intercourse) | <input type="checkbox"/> failing to help the poor if able to do so |
| <input type="checkbox"/> using obscene language | <input type="checkbox"/> teasing a handicapped child |
| <input type="checkbox"/> refusing to befriend a lonely classmate | <input type="checkbox"/> using a fake ID to purchase alcohol |
| <input type="checkbox"/> disobeying one's parents | <input type="checkbox"/> having an abortion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> getting intoxicated on alcohol or drugs | <input type="checkbox"/> being jealous of a classmate's achievements |

✧ discuss ✧

What other information would you need to know about each sin in order to judge its seriousness? What is one example of any new information that would change your initial decision?

B. Moral Decision-Making

How can the moral decision-making procedure (pp. 150-153 of the text) help you to decide how to respond to the following questions?

1. Should you leave the scene of a minor accident in a parking lot when there are no witnesses?
2. Should you read pornographic literature?
3. Should you attend Sunday Mass when you don't want to?
4. Should you reveal a secret you accidentally overheard?
5. Should you tell a friend's parents that he or she is using drugs?
6. Should you cheat when you realize you studied the wrong material for a test?
7. Should you open a side door at the theatre so a friend can sneak into the movie without paying?

Social Justice: Scriptural Background

Listed below are some biblical teachings on social justice. Read each Old and New Testament passage and match them with the short summaries provided.

Old Testament

- ___ 1. Love your neighbor as yourself.
- ___ 2. Be generous to the needy.
- ___ 3. Be just to orphans and widows and share with the stranger.
- ___ 4. Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked.
- ___ 5. Make justice your aim.
- ___ 6. Mere lip service is not enough.

a. Is 58:6–7

c. Is 1:16–17

e. Is 29:13–14

b. Dt 15:11

d. Lv 19:18

f. Dt 10:17–19

New Testament

- ___ 7. All are one in Jesus Christ.
- ___ 8. Everyone is your neighbor.
- ___ 9. Responding to the needs of your least brothers and sisters is responding to Jesus.
- ___ 10. Faith without works is lifeless.
- ___ 11. Love as Jesus has loved you.
- ___ 12. To follow Jesus means to serve the needs of all.

g. Mt 20:24–28

i. Jas 2:14–17

k. Jn 15:12

h. Lk 10:25–37

j. Gal 3:28

l. Mt 25:31–46

Committed to Justice

Read the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25–37. Then, update the parable by putting yourself in it. Consider the following scenario. Then write the answers to the questions in your journal.

You are driving alone at night on a deserted road. You notice a one-car accident victim lying on the side of the road. The person is of another race than you.

1. Should you stop and help? If not, what should you do?
2. What might happen if you stop?
3. What if the person died because you did not stop? Would you be responsible in any way for the person's death?
4. Does Jesus *require* us to do heroic things to be his followers?
5. Who is *your* neighbor?
6. What are some other ways you can apply the message of the Good Samaritan to your life at school? at work? at home?

Baker's Dozen on War and Peace

Directions. Mark each of the following statements using these notations: *A* if you agree, *D* if you disagree, and *N* if you have no opinion. Then discuss the questions that follow.

- ___ 1. Another world war would mean a nuclear war.
- ___ 2. We are all citizens of the world.
- ___ 3. War is the only way to settle international disputes.
- ___ 4. Military strength is the best guarantee of peace.
- ___ 5. War heroes are more popular than peace heroes.
- ___ 6. A peace advocate is unpatriotic.
- ___ 7. Wars are necessary to control the population.
- ___ 8. The United States is a significant peace-keeping force in the world.
- ___ 9. Strong countries must come to the aid of weak countries in the interest of peace.
- ___ 10. It is just as easy to train young people to be peacemakers as it is to train them for the military service.
- ___ 11. There have always been wars, and there will always be wars.
- ___ 12. All wars are immoral.
- ___ 13. Excessive government spending on the military is a sin against the poor.

discuss

1. Tally the responses of the class. Are you surprised by any of the results? Explain.
2. Why did you answer as you did? How might you use historical evidence to support your answers?
3. How do your responses differ from how your parents would respond? Why?
4. What should be a Christian response to each item? Explain.

Sacraments and the Values of Jesus

This chart lists the seven sacraments and a central value of each. Complete the chart by doing the following:

1. Find an action or teaching of Jesus in the gospels that supports each value. List the chapter and verse reference for each. Be prepared to support your choice.
2. Write a few words to remind yourself of a time when someone exemplified this value for you.

Sacrament	Central Value	Gospel Passage	Personal Example
Baptism	new life; celebration of Christian community		
Confirmation	strength and growth; celebration of gifts		
Eucharist	ongoing nourishment; celebration of unity		
Reconciliation	forgiveness and reunion		
Anointing of Sick	health: both physical and spiritual		
Matrimony	love, family life		
Holy Orders	service		

✧ **discuss** ✧

1. What are three significant signs of grace—God’s love—in your life?
2. Discuss the meaning of these sacramental symbols: water, a ring, bread, wine, laying on hands (touch).

The Eucharist

A. *What does the eucharist mean to you?* Here are some Catholic beliefs about the eucharist. Mark an **A** if you agree with the statement, a **D** if you disagree and a **?** if you are not sure.

- ___ 1. The eucharist is a great action of love.
- ___ 2. The eucharist makes me holy.
- ___ 3. The eucharist is a symbol of unity with fellow Catholics.
- ___ 4. The eucharist reminds me to love others.
- ___ 5. The best way to worship God is through the eucharist.

Discuss reasons for your choices.

B. *Mass attendance.* The following are some reasons people give for not going to Mass. Rank them from 1 (the most often given) to 8 (the reason least often given).

- ___ 1. My parents don't go. Why should I?
 - ___ 2. My friends don't go. Why should I?
 - ___ 3. I don't get anything out of it.
 - ___ 4. Mass is boring.
 - ___ 5. I pray better alone.
 - ___ 6. The church can't tell me how I should pray.
 - ___ 7. There are too many hypocrites there.
 - ___ 8. Other:
-

Reflection: Share and discuss your responses.

1. For you, what is the most important reason to go to Mass?
2. Imagine the government banned Catholic Masses. What would your reaction be?
3. What could you say to change the mind of a friend who told you she didn't go to Mass because it was too boring and there were too many hypocrites there?

Christian Marriage

Here is a list of some qualities that are desirable for a successful Christian marriage. Check two which you can work on now:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> patience | <input type="checkbox"/> love of children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> forgiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> friendship skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> self-denial | <input type="checkbox"/> spirit of sacrifice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> delayed gratification | <input type="checkbox"/> thoughtfulness of others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sense of humor | <input type="checkbox"/> ability to enjoy the simple things of life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> willingness to share | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ | |

1. How can each of the qualities help to make a lasting, happy marriage?
2. Interview a happily married Catholic couple. Ask each person what they think are essential traits for a successful marriage.

Sacrifice. In Luke 9:23–25 Jesus talks about “taking up a cross to follow me.” In daily life and especially in marriage, sacrifice is an essential trait for success. Check any examples that apply to you.

For me, taking up a cross means:

- a. being insulted for doing the right thing.
- b. being honest in *all* situations.
- c. sharing my possessions with others.
- d. doing what I think Jesus would want me to do in a given situation.
- e. holding my tongue and not belittling others.
- f. doing necessary but boring things.
- g. other: _____

Learning about Mary

Test your general knowledge about Mary and Marian devotions. Use various reference materials to help you fill-in the blanks.

Countries: Many appeared in the following locations. In what countries are these famous places?

1. Guadalupe: _____ 2. Fatima: _____
3. Lourdes: _____

4. Mary is the patron saint of the United States. Under which title is she the patron saint? _____

Feasts: Match the dates with the feasts.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| ___ 5. Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God | a. March 25 |
| ___ 6. Immaculate Conception | b. August 15 |
| ___ 7. Our Lady of the Rosary | c. January 1 |
| ___ 8. Annunciation | d. October 7 |
| ___ 9. Assumption | e. December 8 |

Potpourri:

10. In what year did Pope Pius XII define the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary into heaven? _____

11. Describe what Mary is doing in the famous statue, *The Pietà*:

12. List two of the so-called "seven sorrows of Mary":

- a. _____
b. _____

13. How many stars are shown forming a crown around Mary's head? (Hint: Rv12:1):

14. Name Mary's mother and father: _____

