

Answers for Apologetics: Catholic FAQs

The questions are found in *Catholic Essentials: An Overview of the Faith*. The questions and answers have been reviewed by the Subcommittee on the Catechism, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, as part of the review of *Catholic Essentials*, and have been found in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Chapter 1

- **How is God the author of the Sacred Scripture?**
God is the author of the sacred scriptures because all of the divinely revealed truths contained in the Bible have been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God inspired the human authors of the Bible. It was as true authors that they wrote whatever God wanted written, and no more.
- **Who wrote the Bible?**
Several human authors wrote the words of the Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments developed from an oral tradition in which stories were passed by word of mouth over generations. Much of the Hebrew scriptures was recorded during the Babylonian captivity. Originally the first five books of the Old Testament were attributed to Moses. More accurately, entire communities, under God's inspiration, helped to record the scriptures. A similar process for the New Testament writings also took place. The gospels were written thirty to sixty years after Jesus' death and resurrection.
- **Why should Christians bother reading the Old Testament?**
The Old Testament is important to Christians for several reasons. The books are divinely inspired. They are heard in liturgy and contain many beautiful prayers. The books of the Old Testament are a testimony to the entire story of our salvation, including a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer.
- **Is it true Catholics do not use or read the Bible?**
On the contrary, Catholics use the Bible regularly in many ways. The Bible is a part of the Church's liturgy, especially the Mass, and of the Church's official prayer, the Divine Office. Catholics also use the Bible for personal prayer. Scripture study groups are a common part of parish life. Scripture has always held an important part in Church life. In the fourth century, St. Jerome famously said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

- Isn't the Bible just another piece of literature?**
 The Bible does contain many literary forms and genres, but it is read like no other piece of literature because it is also the inspired word of God. Scripture always needs to be read or interpreted in the light of the Holy Spirit and under the direction of the Church.
- Is the Bible always literally true?**
 It depends what is meant by "literally." While there are scientific and historical errors in the Bible according to today's understanding, the Bible teaches primarily religious truth. The Bible teaches the truth God wants to communicate to mankind. As the Second Vatican Council taught, the Bible teaches "firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" (*Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 11).
- How should we read the Bible?**
 Catholics read the Bible contextually. That is, they understand the Sacred Scriptures in the broad historical, cultural, and geographical context in which they were written. They also examine the styles of literature present. Catholics rely on the Magisterium (Pope and bishops) to help them interpret the meaning of the Bible. Oppositely, a fundamentalist approach at reading the Bible involves taking all the words literally. For example, a fundamentalist would believe that God created the world in six twenty-four hour days. A no less important criteria is that Sacred Scripture must be read in the light of the Holy Spirit by whom it was inspired and written. This means that the reader must pay attention to the content and unity of the Bible as a whole, read Scripture in light of the Church's entire Tradition, and be attentive to the analogy of faith, that is, "the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of revelation" (CCC. 114).
- What is the most important message of the Bible?**
 As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out, Christ is the unique Word of the Scriptures. The most important message of the scriptures is that Christ—the Word of God—became man and brought salvation to mankind through his life, death, and resurrection.
- Why do Protestants quote the Bible more than Catholics?**
 For many Protestants, the Bible is the sole source of authority and teaching about Jesus Christ. For Catholics, the sacred Scripture along with sacred Tradition form together the Word of God.

- **Why do Catholics believe in things and do things that are not in the Bible?**

Similarly, the Bible is not the sole means that God chose to hand on the truths of Revelation. Scripture and Tradition are the two complementary ways Revelation is handed down. There are things taught in Tradition that are not explicitly found in Scripture. However nothing taught through Tradition ever contradicts Scripture since both come through Christ through the Apostles. The Apostolic Tradition refers to what Jesus taught the Apostles and early disciples that was first passed on orally, while only later being written down. The Apostolic Tradition is part of God's revelation to us, just as Scripture is.

- **Why are there differences between the Gospels?**

Actually, though the Bible designates four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), in reality there is only one Gospel running throughout the New Testament, that is the Gospel or "Good News" about Jesus Christ. The differences between the four separate Gospels have to do with the various times, audiences, and theological points of emphasis of each of the evangelists. For example, Mark emphasized Jesus the Suffering Servant and the meaning of discipleship, Matthew wrote for a primarily Jewish audience and traced Jesus as a descendent of Jewish patriarchs. Luke's Gospel was for Gentile Christians and served as an opening to the Acts of the Apostles. John's Gospel, written years later than the others, emphasized the divinity of Jesus.

- **Why do some people try to change what the Church teaches about Jesus Christ?**

People have tried to change what the Church teaches about Jesus for many different reasons. Sometimes it is to justify their particular belief or lack of belief. Sometimes it has been an authentic effort to explain mysteries about Jesus Christ or God's revelation. Early heresies about Jesus like Arianism denied his divinity. Gospels the Church determined were not written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit also did the same. Today, groups like the "Jesus Seminar" likewise try to explain the miracles of Jesus in scientific terms, also undermining his divinity.

Chapter 2

- **How can we know that God really exists?**

We can know God naturally by the use of our human reason while reflecting on the world of nature that God created. We also know

God exists because he reveals himself, most perfectly in Jesus Christ. We see the effects of God's existence. In the same way, we would not know that there was wind unless we saw and felt its effects.

- **Is Jesus God?**

Yes. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus is one person, the Second Person of the Trinity, with two natures, human and divine. He is the "Word made flesh."

- **Is Jesus human the same way that I am human?**

Jesus was a real person who lived and walked on this earth. He lived in Nazareth, a town in Israel nearly 2,000 years ago. Jesus is like us in everything but sin. He was able to grow in "wisdom, age, and grace."

- **Why did God become man?**

Years and years of sacrifice by the Jewish people—including prayer, fasting, and Temple sacrifice of animals—were not enough to bring salvation. As the book of Hebrews pointed out "it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins."

Continuing, Hebrews quotes Jesus praying the words of the Psalms:

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in
(Heb 10:4-6).

The Son of God became man to reconcile us sinners to God. He became man in order to teach us the meaning of true love. He became man in order to be a model of holiness. He became man to make us sharers of his divine nature. By becoming fully human, God has united himself to us. Unlike the early heresies that supposed that Jesus only "appeared" to be human, Jesus is truly human—in body, mind, and soul.

- **Why is there suffering if there is a good God?**

This is one of the most challenging and perplexing questions that humans have ever faced. With Job who wondered as much, we are ultimately resigned to the fact that God's ways are much higher than our own and that we will never have a complete answer to this question while on earth. However, we do know that God is in no way, directly or indirectly, the cause of any moral evil. God permits evil, suffering, and death, because he respects human freedom and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from them. From our human experience, we know that pain often brings perfection and

satisfaction. Consider the athlete who puts in months and months of painful weightlifting and running in order to achieve a satisfying season. Ultimately, we only have to look to the greatest moral evil ever committed—the Passion and death of God’s only Son—and the subsequent good (Christ’s resurrection and our redemption) that came from it. However, even for all that, evil itself never becomes a good.

- **Did Jesus have brothers and sisters?**

The New Testament does mention “brothers and sisters” of Jesus (e.g., Mark 3:31-35). The Church understands these references to be to children of another Mary, a disciple of Christ. The words brother and sister may also refer to close relations like cousins. The Church teaches that Jesus was Mary’s only child and that she was ever-virgin, though she is the spiritual mother of all.

- **Does God want us to be happy?**

Yes. From the beginning of Creation, God has created us to be happy both in this world and the next, and has showed us ways to be truly happy. Unhappiness is caused when people do not listen to God. The appearance of God’s Son, Jesus, showed us that God wants us to be happy in spite of our sinfulness. Jesus wants us to share in his joy. His blueprint for happiness is the Beatitudes (Matthew 5).

- **How do we know that what the Catholic Church teaches has come from God?**

What was revealed in and through Jesus Christ was entrusted to the Apostles who were taught directly by Jesus. We can be sure that what the Church teaches has come from God because of Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic succession. Also, Jesus promised the Church he would be with her until the end of time (see Matthew 28:20).

- **Why is Mary the Mother of God?**

Even before the birth of Jesus, Mary was called by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, “the mother of my Lord” (Lk 1:43). The Son born to Mary, Jesus, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was none other than the Father’s eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence, Mary is the Mother of God.

- **What are miracles?**

Miracles are signs or wonders that can only be attributed to the power of God. Jesus performed miracles such as healings and

controlling of nature which were signs of the appearance of the Kingdom of God.

- **Is God male?**

God is pure spirit who is beyond biological distinction. God has both feminine and masculine characteristics, as evidenced by the fact that both men and women are created “in the image and likeness of God.” This all said, we are called by Jesus himself to address God as Father, and to turn to him as the children he loves. What is God the Father like? Even in the Old Testament, where *Yahweh* (the name used for God, meaning Lord) is often depicted more in his power, the image of fatherhood is used several times and Yahweh’s compassion comes through.

- **Why did Jesus teach in parables?**

Parables were an excellent way to teach about the kingdom of God. Using common events that everyone can understand, Jesus’ parables also ended with a surprising twist that, upon reflection, taught a religious lesson

Chapter 3

- **How can Adam’s sin affect me?**

Adam sinned as he head of the human race. His sin lost divine grace not only for himself but for all of his descendents. We are born without the grace needed to live in heaven. Also, we are mortal, ignorant, weakened in our wills, inclined to sin, and subject to suffering. Baptism restores our way to heaven, but other effects of Original Sin remain.

- **Was Jesus Mary’s Savior?**

Yes and Mary collaborated with Jesus’ work of salvation from the moment she pronounced her “fiat”—that is, her consent to be the Mother of God. She also collaborated with Jesus’ entire ministry and was with him to the moment of his death on the cross.

- **Who is responsible for the death of Jesus?**

Throughout history, the Jews have taken unfair blame for the death of Jesus. The Jews, collectively, must not be held responsible for the death of Jesus. As to the personal sin of participants like Judas, members of the Sanhedrin, and Pilate, it is known to God alone. Rather, the answer to the question is more accurately “all sinners are responsible for the death of Jesus” as our sins affected Christ himself.

- **Why would God the Father allow his Son Jesus to suffer and die the way he did?**

God the Father allowed Jesus to suffer and die the way he did because of his love for humanity. The Father wants all people to live with him in heaven. Because of the sin of Adam, heaven was deprived to mankind. The only way for this to be reversed was for Christ, the New Adam, to suffer and die for us in repair for Adam's sin.

- **Is believing in Jesus all I need to do to be saved?**

Salvation comes from God alone. We are saved through our faith in Jesus Christ expressed through our life in the Church, including our participation in the sacraments.

- **Why did Jesus descend into hell?**

In scripture, the place where the dead go was called hell—Sheol in Hebrew or Hades in Greek. When the Apostles Creed says that Jesus descended into hell, it is teaching that Jesus really died and through his death conquered death. He did not descend into hell to free the unjust or to destroy hell, but to lead the dead who were just to heaven. As the first letter of Peter says: "The gospel was preached even to the dead" (1 Pt 4:6).

- **Is there really a hell?**

Scripture and Church Tradition both affirm the existence of hell. For example, Jesus referred several times to Gehenna (hell). In the parable of the sheep and goats (Mt 25:41–46), Jesus condemned to hell those who fail to respond to those in need. The existence of hell flows from God's gift of free will. He reserves a place for those who refuse, by their own free choice, to believe in him and to be converted from their sinfulness, even to the end of their lives. The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, our only source for life and happiness.

- **In the end, isn't it only the final result that matters?**

No. Every word and action a person undertakes in life matters. One must never do evil that a good may come from it.

- **What kind of body will I have after I die?**

The kind of body we will have in heaven exceeds our imagination and understanding. Yet, the Eucharist gives us a glimpse into the kind of body we will have after we die. At Eucharist, the bread that is consecrated is no longer ordinary bread, it is the Body of Christ.

Likewise, when we die, our bodies, which have partaken of the Eucharist, will no longer be incorruptible.

- **What is heaven like?**

The pleasures and happiness in store for us in heaven are beyond human imagination. Scripture uses many images to help describe heaven; for example, wedding feast, light, life, peace, paradise, the Father's house, heavenly Jerusalem. But even these words cannot describe heaven. St. Paul wrote: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9).

- **When will Jesus come again?**

Since the Ascension of Jesus to heaven, Jesus' Second Coming is imminent, though we do not know the day or hour. We are to live each moment as if Jesus may come. Before Christ's Second Coming, the Church will pass through a final test that will severely challenge the faith of many. At the end of time, all creatures in the universe will acknowledge Christ as Lord.

Chapter 4

- **Is the Catholic Church really the only true Church?**

The very name "catholic" means that the Church strives to reach out and include all people—this is the Church's mission. The Church teaches that "one true religion subsists in the catholic and apostolic Church " yet it recognizes that holiness can be found and God's will detected in various other Christian and non-Christian communities and in individuals who through no fault of their own have not been exposed to the Catholic Church.

- **Why do we need organized religion?**

God wants us to come to him as members of his family so he established the Church to accomplish that purpose. Because we are social in nature, we need each other's support and example. Organized religion as practiced in the Catholic Church offers us authentic worship in spirit and truth when we unite ourselves with Christ's self-offering at Mass.

- **How can the Church preach holiness when many of its members, including clergy, are guilty of terrible wrongs?**

Some members of the Church might be hypocritical. However the individual sinfulness of Church members, including clergy, does not

make the Church herself sinful. The Church is guided and animated by the Holy Spirit, and as the Body of Christ, remains sinless even if her members sin.

- **Did Jesus found the Catholic Church?**

Yes. The Church was foreshadowed from the world's beginning and prepared for in the Old Testament when God called Abraham. The Church was established by Jesus Christ when he called the Apostles with Peter as their head, proclaimed the Gospel, and instituted the sacraments. The Church was born from Christ's self-giving on the cross. The Church was revealed to the world at Pentecost.

- **Why is the Church called *Roman Catholic*?**

A simple answer is that the Church is called Roman Catholic because of its unity with the pope, the bishop of Rome. It was a term that first came to use about the time of the Eastern Schism, which led to the division of Christians between those united to the patriarch in Constantinople and the pope. However, there are many other Catholic rites that are in union with the pope other than Roman rites. Hence, the term Roman Catholic is often one used by Christians outside of the Church as a way not to recognize the Catholic Church as the one, true, Church.

- **Why do I have to be Catholic?**

To be a Catholic is to be a member of the one, true, Church of Christ. While elements of truth can be found in other churches and religions, the fullness of the means of salvation subsists in the Catholic Church.

- **How is the Church able to maintain its unity even though it is lived out in many different cultures?**

The Church is able to sustain unity because of the Magisterium, the apostolic teaching office of the pope and bishops which guide her. The Church is a "communion of saints," an assembly of holy persons who are united both in the Eucharist and through the Eucharist.

- **Is the Church necessary for salvation?**

The answer to this traditional question is "yes" simply because Jesus is necessary for salvation and Jesus remains present in the Church, his body. Those who know and understand that the Church is the Body of Christ, yet reject it, are rejecting salvation. However, this also means that those who never heard of Christ or the Church have not forfeited their chance for salvation.

- Do I have to believe everything the Pope says?**
 The Church believes in the primacy of the bishop of Rome, the Pope. This means that since the time of St. Peter, Christians have been obliged to follow the teachings of the Pope in matters of faith and morals. Of course, this does not extend to matters not concerning faith (e.g., the Pope says “everyone’s favorite color must be blue”).
- What do I tell people who say to me, “Catholics worship Mary”?**
 You can tell them they are wrong. Catholics worship and adore God alone, as required by the first commandment. Worship of any other person or thing would be idolatry, honoring gods other than the one, true Lord. Catholics do venerate or respect Mary and all the saints because of their holiness and faithfulness as disciples of Christ. We revere Mary more than the other saints because she is the Mother of God, the queen of all saints.
- How can a Catholic be excommunicated?**
 To be excommunicated means that a baptized person is no longer “in communion” with the rest of the Catholic faithful. One type of excommunication is automatic and occurs when a Catholic commits a particular sinful action, defined as: desecrating the Eucharist, laying hands violently on the Pope, violating the seal of confession (for priests only), giving absolution to an accomplice in sin (for priests only), participating in an abortion, or committing the sins of apostasy, heresy, or schism. The other type of excommunication is imposed by the Church at the discretion of a local bishop for a particular action; for example, pretending to preside at Eucharist although one is not a priest.
- What is necessary for someone to be a canonized saint?**
 The Congregation for the Causes of Saints is an office of the Pope in Rome. It examines the life of Christians who are proposed for sainthood, those who have practiced heroic virtue in their lives. The canonization process is many-tiered and may take years as the person’s life, death, writings, and more are analyzed. Canonization is preceded by beatification. The person is called blessed and may be honored on a local basis. It’s important to remember, though, that *all* Christians are called to sainthood and that anyone who is with God is, in fact, a saint.
- How much of the world’s population is Catholic?**
 The latest census numbered one billion Roman Catholics worldwide, about 17 percent of the world’s total population. There are also an

additional one billion Christians of other denominations. Islam is the second largest faith with 1.3 billion adherents (22 percent).

Chapter 5

- **Did the early Church baptize infants?**

From the time of the Apostles young children had been baptized. In fact, when Peter spoke from the window of the Upper Room on Pentecost, he said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Note that Peter said, "every one of you." He also added, "For the promise is made to you and to your children and to . . . whomever the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). The New Testament also cites several examples of entire households that were baptized.

- **Is Baptism all that is needed for salvation?**

Jesus himself said that Baptism is necessary for salvation. The Church confirms his teaching and takes care to see that all who have had the Gospel proclaimed to are baptized. The Church also teaches that though "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments" (CCC, 1257). The Church has always recognized the validity of a "baptism of desire" (those who seek baptism but die before being able to be baptized) and a "baptism of blood" (those who are martyred for their faith prior to being baptized). If to the question of Baptism being "all that is needed for salvation" means that Baptism is automatic for salvation, it is reminded that only God is the author of salvation.

- **What happens to children who died without Baptism?**

The Church trusts these children to God's mercy and recalls Jesus' words, "Let the children come to me" as a sign of hope that children who have died without Baptism will be saved. Pope Benedict XVI taught that there are "serious" grounds to hope that children who died without being baptized can go to heaven. Still, the Church recognizes the urgency to welcome children to Christ through Baptism.

- **Can a non-Catholic be a godparent at Baptism?**

A Catholic, who has been confirmed and received the Eucharist, must be the baptismal sponsor. A baptized person who is not Catholic may serve as a witness with the Catholic sponsor.

- **Is it necessary to be “born again?”**

The phrase “born again” comes from a translation of John 3:3-5 where Jesus tells the Pharisee Nicodemus that “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” Some Christians believe that the phrase “born again” refers to a personal conversion experience that guarantees the person salvation. Catholics understand “born again” to mean the spiritual rebirth that takes place at Baptism. So, if you have been baptized, you can respond that you have already been “born again.”

- **Why do Catholics believe in the authority of the Pope?**

The Pope, the bishop of Rome, is the successor to St. Peter on whom Jesus founded his Church. The pope is the “perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of bishops and of the multitude of the faithful” (*Lumen Gentium*, 23). Without the pope the unity of the Church would be threatened by local churches and bishops addressing competing national and cultural issues.

- **Why can't priests be married?**

According to Church discipline, ordained ministers in the Latin Church are normally chosen among men who live a celibate life and who intend to remain celibate “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (1 Cor 7:32). Celibate men can give themselves with an undivided heart to God and the Church. Celibacy is a sign of God’s kingdom. In the Eastern Churches, bishops are chosen from among celibate men; priests and deacons may be chosen among married men.

- **Why do you have to confess your sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Penance?**

Jesus instituted this sacrament for the forgiveness of sins after Baptism. The priest is both the representative of Christ and the Church. Confessing to a priest in the sacrament of Penance is a way to experience first hand the forgiving touch and saving love of Jesus. Reconciling with the Church is important so we can reclaim our functions within the body of Christ. The Sacrament of Penance is necessary to forgive grave sins, but it is not essential for the forgiveness of venial sins.

- **What are the rules for receiving Holy Communion?**

Anyone who wishes to receive communion must be in a state of grace. If you are aware of a mortal sin you have committed, you must receive absolution for the sin in the Sacrament of Penance before going to communion. Also, you must abstain from food or drink (with the exception of water and medicines) for at least one hour before receiving communion.

- **Why do Catholics believe that Jesus is really present in the consecrated species of bread and wine and that they are not just symbolic of his presence?**

Jesus said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. . . . For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:54-56). This is the scriptural basis for our Catholic belief. Catholics believe that at the time of the consecration (when the priest repeats Jesus' words from the Last Supper, "This is my body" and "This is my blood") the substance of the bread and wine change into the reality of Jesus.

- **Why can't I receive Communion in another Christian Church? Why can't my friend who is Christian, but not Catholic, receive Communion at my church?**

The very word *communion* has to do with unity, both in our beliefs about Jesus Christ and with one another. It would not be honest for a person to receive communion if he or she did not hold the same beliefs as Catholics do about Jesus; for example, that he is really present in the bread and wine. For the same reason a Catholic cannot receive communion at a Protestant Church.

- **Am I really required to go to Mass every Sunday?**

Yes, Catholics are required to go to Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation unless excused for a serious reason, like an illness. This is one of the Church laws and it is broken without good reason only under the penalty of sin. There are good reasons for this rule. For one, Christ is present at the Eucharist and actively anticipating our being there. Secondly, our absence creates a void, just as missing any one part of a larger body would.

- **Is the reception of Confirmation necessary for salvation?**

The effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as was once granted to the Apostles at Pentecost. Confirmation increases and deepens the grace of Baptism. Baptism is certainly valid without Confirmation (see: Baptism/Salvation, page 00), but Christian initiation remains incomplete with Confirmation.

- **What is the sin against the Holy Spirit, spoke of in Matthew 12:31–32, that cannot be forgiven?**

The sin against the Holy Spirit that Jesus speaks of is attributing works of the Spirit of God to Satan, exactly what Jesus' enemies had done when they said Jesus' power over demons came from Satan. God's mercy has no limits. But anyone who deliberately rejects God's mercy, his offer of forgiveness, and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit by refusing to repent is guilty of the eternal sin.

- **Aren't the sacraments just celebrations to mark significant moments in our lives?**

Certainly such an impression may be cast today. Sometimes people seem to use sacraments like Baptism, First Communion, and Marriage as occasions to get together with family and to celebrate a key stage of life. While the sacraments are celebrated at significant moments in life, they are much more than just celebrations of those moments. They are personal encounters with Christ who acts through the Sacraments to help us. Each sacrament gives a special grace.

Chapter 6

- **How can the Catholic Church maintain that certain moral teaching applies to everyone and not only to Catholics?**

Human dignity, justice, and morality are meant for all people, not just Catholics. The Church has the responsibility to teach everyone as persuasively as possible about how people should live, act, and treat each other. When dealing with public policy, the Church promotes universal moral laws and the development of just public policies, not its own Church laws.

- **If God created humans with free will, can't we alone decide what is right or wrong?**

God gives us the gifts of intellect and free will, allowing us to make choices. Also, God created a world with natural laws (e.g., the law of gravity) with which he rarely interferes. To God, everything about your life—beginning to end—is happening now. It's something like standing over and watching an ant trail from the ant's hole in the ground to a source of water. You can see an individual ant's past, present, and future. But you don't interfere with the ant's freedom to choose the route from point A to point B.

- Where does the Bible name the difference between mortal and venial sins?**
 The Bible does distinguish between different kinds of sins. For example, the Letter to the Galatians contrasts the words of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:19–21). The first letter of John also mentions an evaluation of sin according to their gravity: “There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly” (1 Jn 5:16–17). The distinction of mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture, became part of Church Tradition.
- What happens if you die without receiving absolution for mortal sin?**
 If mortal sin is not redeemed by repentance and God’s forgiveness, it causes “exclusion from Christ’s kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back” (CCC, 1861). However, though people can judge what is a grave offense, God’s justice and mercy always take precedent.
- What happens if you die with only venial sins?**
 Venial sin at the time of death merits “temporal punishment,” that is, once repented it “does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness” (CCC 1863 quoting Pope John Paul II).
- What is purgatory?**
 The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines purgatory as “a state of final purification after death and before entrance into heaven for those who died in God’s friendship, but were only imperfectly purified.” Purgatory is also called the “Church suffering.” The existence of purgatory is rooted in Scripture. For example, Judas Maccabeus and his soldiers prayed for the martyred Jews that they might be released from their sins (see 2 Maccabees 12:39–46). The Church has always offered prayers, almsgiving, indulgences, and acts of penance for the “poor souls in purgatory.”
- Are Christians always obliged to obey civil law and authorities?**
 Christians must obey their upright conscience in all matters. If civil law and authorities are opposed to the teachings of the gospel, the fundamental rights of persons, and the moral law, then a Christian must in good conscience disobey the civil law or authorities.
- How can I tell if I made the right decision in the area of morality?**

If your conscience has been well formed through study of scripture, prayer, an examination of conscience, and you have been assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the witness and advice of others, including the authoritative teaching of the Church, and you do *not* follow your conscience, you will often experience guilt. In this case, guilt can be productive. It reminds you of what you know to be right. Also, some rules of morality apply to every decision that you make: evil may never be done to produce a good result, the Golden Rule (“do to others as you wish done to you”) always applies, and loving decisions always involve showing respect for others.

- **Isn't it wrong to judge another person by telling them something they are doing is wrong?**

No. In fact, we have a responsibility to encourage one another to avoid sinful behavior. Just as you would warn a friend of something that could cause physical injury, you are obliged to warn them of something that could cause spiritual injury—that is, sin.

- **If the Bible permits justice in terms for “an eye for an eye,” then why is the Church opposed to capital punishment?**

Jesus himself ruled out revenge as a motive for punishing those who commit crime. The Church speaks out against the death penalty because of its respect for life, even the life of a convicted criminal. Opposing the death penalty helps testify to the dignity of humanity and tells society we can break the cycle of violence. By keeping the criminal imprisoned, the person is not only kept from doing harm to others, he or she keeps the possibility of redeeming himself or herself. Finally, traditional Church teaching does not exclude recourse to the death penalty if it is the only possible way of protecting society against the criminal.

- **Can rich people go to heaven?**

Yes, Jesus came to save everyone, though he did say that it is difficult for rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven. The key issue is not whether or not a person is rich, but whether or not he or she is greedy. The rich person who counteracts greed by serving the poor and treating the poor as “another self” accomplishes much. Of course, it's important to remember that who is saved and who is not saved is entirely up to God.

- **Why does God allow death?**

Death was not part of God's original plan for humans. Death was the consequence of the first sin of Adam. However, “Just as in

Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life" (1 Cor 15:22).

- **What is meant by "rising from the dead?"**

At death, the body and soul are separated. The body decays and the soul goes on to meet God. Through the power of Jesus' resurrection, God will grant incorruptible life to our bodies by uniting them with our souls at the end of time.

- **Where is Heaven?**

Heaven is our final communion with the Blessed Trinity, with Mary, the angels, and all the saints. "Where" is heaven is beyond our understanding.

- **Do we know when the world will end?**

Many religious groups today make predictions about when the end of the world will occur. Several claim the end is imminent. Recall Jesus' words when asked this question by the apostles. He told them, "but of that day or hour, no one knows . . . only the Father" (Mk 13:32). Rather, Jesus expects that we will live every day as if it were our last.