

BASIC CATECHISM

FAQs About the Catholic Faith



Creed
Sacraments
Morality
Prayer

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Basic Catechism

FAQs About the Catholic Faith

Eighth Revised Edition

In accordance with the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

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Introductory Note

This eighth edition of the *Basic Catechism* has been expanded and revised to more closely reflect the Church's teaching on the challenges facing the faithful Christian in today's society. It also reflects changes in the liturgy due to the new translation of the Mass texts that took effect in Advent 2011. The material is divided according to the four sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: the profession of faith, the celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ, and Christian prayer.

The numbers in parentheses that follow the questions refer to related paragraphs in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Together with the index, these cross-references will direct the reader to further information on particular topics. A section of basic prayers and guidelines for Christian living serves as a convenient reference.

THE PROFESSION OF FAITH

How We Know About God

Does God exist?

Yes, God exists.

One God and Father of us all, who is above all, through all, and in all. (Eph 4:6)

Who is God?

God is the all-powerful Spirit who created everything that exists. He is our Father who is with us always and awaits us in heaven to share his everlasting joys with us. (205–221)

For God who made the world and everything in it—the Lord of the heavens and the earth—does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, nor does he need anything we can do for him since he gives everyone life and breath and everything. (Acts 17:24)

How can we know that God exists?

Through reason and revelation we can know that God exists. (35)

What is reason?

Reason is our power to think. (33)

What are some of the ways God's existence can be known by our power to think and reason?

We can know about God's existence from nature's laws and purposes, the degrees of perfection in the universe, motion,

causes and effects, and the order and design of the universe. The longings of the human heart, conscience, and freedom point to God as the ultimate source of our happiness. (31–35)

The Bible puts this question to us:

For if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the LORD of these things? (Wis 13:9)

What arguments do the “new” atheists offer against belief in God?

They offer arguments such as these to disprove God’s existence: Religion opposes progress and freedom by encouraging a demeaning acceptance of suffering and suppression; religion promotes dissension and thus evil, violence, and abuse; religion negates personal maturity with a primitive, superstitious delusion; and religion pits irrational speculation against scientific evidence.

Does the universe itself point to a Creator?

Yes, in its magnificence and order the universe points to a Creator. St. Paul says:

From the creation of the world God’s invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been accessible to human knowledge through what can be perceived, and so they have no excuse. (Rom 1:20. See also Rom 11:36.) (32, 36)

What other religious facts can we know by our reason?

Some religious facts we can know by our reason are:

- ❖ the human soul will never die (366);
- ❖ everyone has a duty to worship God, who created us (2096, 2135);
- ❖ the historical character of the Gospels makes them worthy of being believed (514–515).

What is God's revelation?

God's revelation is what he has told us about himself, ourselves, and his plan of love for us. Revelation is God's self-communication to us, which he has made known to us through Scripture and Tradition, as taught by the teaching authority of the Church. (50–51, 80)

Of old God spoke to our fathers through the prophets many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us through a Son. . . . (Heb 1:1–2)

Why do we need God's revelation?

We need God's revelation because without his help our reason could not discover everything that God wants us to know about himself, ourselves, and his plan of love for us now and in the life to come. (37–38, 52)

How has God given us his revelation?

God has made himself known to us through his deeds and words in salvation history. He gave us the fullness of revelation in his Son, Jesus Christ, who is God-made-man. This revelation comes to us through Scripture and Tradition, as interpreted by the Church. (74–87, 95)

What is Sacred Tradition?

Sacred Tradition is the process by which the Church, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, preserves and hands on to all generations, in its teaching, life, and worship, all that it is and all that it believes. (78)

But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (Jn 21:25)

How important is Sacred Tradition?

Sacred Tradition is of prime importance because in it we have certainty about the things we must believe and do. (80–81)

Stand firm and hold fast to the tradition we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by a letter of ours. (2 Thes 2:15)

What is meant by the “heritage of faith”?

The “heritage of faith” (sometimes called the “deposit of faith”) means the truths which God has revealed and has given to the Church to keep and to teach. This should not be thought of in a static sense, since the Church grows in understanding this heritage of faith. (84–95, 175)

What is the Bible?

The Bible is the book which contains the inspired word of God. In it God speaks to us through the writings of human authors whom he chose and whom the Holy Spirit guided. (81)

Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. (Jer 30:2)

What are other names for the Bible?

The Bible is also called “Sacred Scripture,” which means “holy writings,” or just “Scriptures,” or “the word of God,” since it is God’s revelation to us.

What are the main parts of the Bible?

The main parts of the Bible are the Old Testament, the forty-six books written before the birth of Jesus, and the New Testament, the twenty-seven books written after Jesus’

resurrection. (120) These books are listed in the *Guidelines for Christian Living* (see p. 268).

What is the Bible's main theme?

The Bible's main theme is God's saving love for us human beings, even though we are sinful.

What is divine inspiration?

Divine inspiration is the special guidance the Holy Spirit gave to the Bible's human authors, so that they wrote everything God wanted and only that, without error. (105–106)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, re-proving, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be fully capable of carrying out every good work.
(2 Tm 3:16–17)

What is the Old Testament about?

The Old Testament tells the history of God's saving actions in the lives of the chosen people, the Israelites, through whom God brought about his plan of salvation. (122)

Salvation is from the Jews. (Jn 4:22)

Briefly, what is the history of the Chosen People?

Their history began with Abraham, whom God called to be father and leader of the Chosen People. Later Moses was sent to free the people from slavery in Egypt and to give them the Ten Commandments, which God had revealed to him. God chose Joshua to lead the people into Canaan, the "Promised Land." Later David became a great king of Israel and an ancestor of Christ. God sent prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah to speak his words to the people and encourage them to grow in fidelity to the covenant. At one point, God

permitted the destruction of the center of worship, Jerusalem, and the exile of its people into Babylon. The exiles who later returned to Jerusalem rebuilt the temple and renewed the covenant. (59–64)

What is the New Testament about?

The New Testament is about the birth, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as well as the life and growth of the early Church which he founded. (124)

The appointed time has come and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Good News! (Mk 1:15)

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel or “Good News” consists of the first four books of the New Testament and gives us a detailed description of the life and teachings of Jesus. For Christians, these four books are the most important books of the Bible. (125)

What do we learn from the Gospels?

From the Gospels we learn what Jesus asks us to believe and do in order to be saved and reach heaven. We learn about the great love Jesus and his Father have for us. Because of this love Jesus died for us, to redeem us from our sins. (125)

What we have seen and heard we also proclaim to you so you too may be in fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, and we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 Jn 1:3–4)

How did the four Gospels come to be written?

The Gospels were formed through a three-stage process: (a) the life and ministry of Jesus; (b) the oral preaching of the

apostles, who proclaimed what Jesus had done and taught; (c) the writing of the Gospels. The evangelists drew on the oral tradition to give their specific audiences an account of Jesus' saving deeds. (126)

Can people make mistakes when they try to understand the Bible?

Difficulties in translating and interpreting the language, customs, and history of the times can lead to misunderstanding biblical texts. One of the reasons Jesus gave us the Church is to guide us in reading the Bible. (109–119)

Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you go astray, that you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?" (Mk 12:24)

There are some things in his [St. Paul's] letters which are difficult to understand—ignorant and unstable people distort them, just as they distort the other scriptures, to their own destruction! (2 Pt 3:16)

Can the Church make a mistake in interpreting the Bible?

The Church can never make a mistake in authentically interpreting the Bible because the Holy Spirit preserves the Church from error. (85–87)

What does the Church consider in interpreting the Bible?

The Church considers the tradition of the Church Fathers and Doctors, the original languages, literary forms, the actual text, and historical findings. This helps to reach the true meaning which the sacred author, under divine inspiration, had in writing and to avoid a purely fundamentalist view which can be a false interpretation. (111–114)

What is the difference between the Catholic Bible and those of other Christian denominations?

There are two main differences: first, the number of books of the Bible accepted as inspired by God is different, and second, the interpretation of certain teachings in the Bible differ, as found in study notes.

What is the reason for these differences?

These differences resulted from biblical scholarship and theology within Catholic and Protestant tradition. While we respect the beliefs of the different churches and show reverence for the Bible in every form, as Catholics we trust in the Catholic biblical teaching because of our belief in the Holy Spirit's guidance.

How is the Bible to be read?

The Bible is to be read humbly and prayerfully, with a readiness to put God's word into practice. (131–133)

What is faith?

Faith is a gift from God by which we believe what he has revealed. By faith the whole person adheres to God in a free response of loving trust. (91, 153–155, 176–184)

Now it is impossible to please God without faith, because to even approach God you have to believe that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Heb 11:6)

What is the Profession of Faith we recite at Mass?

The Profession of Faith we recite at Mass is either the Nicene Creed, an ancient declaration of belief in the principal truths of faith, or the Apostles' Creed, which is especially used during Lent and Easter. (195)

Who are the faithful?

The faithful are loyal followers of the Lord Jesus. They share in his priestly, prophetic, and royal office through their Baptism. (871–873)

Symeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of equal worth with ours through the saving will of our God and the Savior Jesus Christ: may grace and peace abound to you through knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.
(2 Pt 1:1–2)

What Is God Like?

Is God perfect?

Yes, God is perfect. He is almighty, eternal, all-present, all-good, all-knowing, all-merciful, and all-just. (213)

Nor does he need anything we can do for him since he gives everyone life and breath and everything. (Acts 17:25)

What do we mean when we say that God is almighty, eternal, merciful, and just?

Almighty means all-powerful.

And you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. (1 Chr 29:12)

Eternal means “outside of time”—without beginning or end—and unchanging. (220)

For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. (Ps 90:4)

Merciful means loving and forgiving.

Be merciful, as your Father is merciful. (Lk 6:36)

Just means fair.

Just and true are your ways, King of nations! (Rev 15:3)

What word describes God’s unlimited perfection?

God’s unlimited perfection is *infinite*.

But for God all things are possible. (Mt 19:26)

Does God change?

No, God does not change. (212, 227)

... in whom there is no variation or darkness due to change. (Jas 1:17)

What does the name YHWH tell us about God?

The Hebrew name YHWH, meaning “I AM WHO AM,” tells us that God is life itself. (206, 213)

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you’ . . . this is my name for ever. . . .” (Ex 3:14–15)

Does God care about us?

Yes, God cares about us. His loving action in our lives is called Divine Providence. (302–314)

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. (Ps 139:9–10)

What is a mystery?

In religion a mystery is a great truth revealed by God which our limited intelligence will never be able to wholly understand. (42–43, 48)

What special mystery has God told us about himself?

God has told us about the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. He has revealed himself to be three Persons in one God—our *Triune God*. (234, 237)

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . . (Mt 28:19)

Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ. . . . (1 Pt 1:2)

What is the mystery of the Blessed Trinity?

The mystery of the Blessed Trinity is that there are three divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in the one, true God. (233, 253–255)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor 13:13)

Is the Father God?

The Father is God and the First Person of the Blessed Trinity. (240, 262)

Is the Son God?

The Son is God and the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. (240–242)

Is the Holy Spirit God?

The Holy Spirit is God and the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. (243)

Can we understand anything about the mystery of the Blessed Trinity?

We can understand that by “one God” we mean the one divine nature, while by “three Persons” we mean the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who each totally possess the divine nature. (253–256)

One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all, through all, and in all. (Eph 4:4–6)

What is the importance of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity for our own lives?

The three Persons of the Trinity call us to everlasting happiness with them. At Baptism they came to live within us. If

we grow in grace through the sacraments and virtuous living, we will draw closer to our Triune God throughout life and will share eternal union with the Trinity in heaven. (257–260)

I bend my knees to the Father. From him every family in the heavens and on earth is named, so that from the riches of his glory he may grant you inner strength and power through his Spirit. May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, firmly rooted and established in love, so that with all the saints you may be able to understand the breadth, the length, the height, and depth, and know Christ's love which surpasses all knowledge so that you may be filled with all God's fullness. (Eph 3:14–19)