

Precepts of the Catholic Church

The Precepts or Laws of the Catholic Church connect our moral life to our liturgical life. Participation in the liturgical life is meant to nourish and strengthen our moral life. The fact that these are obligatory laws is meant to convey to the faithful, the **indispensable minimum** in the spirit of prayer and moral effort that is required in order to grow in the love of God and neighbor.

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church**¹ states only 5 Precepts as those “indispensable minimum” elements necessary for the faithful to follow. The **Baltimore Catechism**² gives a slightly different list of 5 precepts and adds a 6th, while the **Handbook for Catholics**³, used in our Religious Education program gives, again, a slightly different list and adds a 7th.

	Catechism of the Catholic Church		Baltimore Catechism		Handbook for Catholics
1	You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.	1	To assist at Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation.	1	To worship God by participating in Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.
2	You shall confess your sins at least once a year.	2	To fast and abstain on the days appointed.	2	To receive Holy Communion frequently and the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.
3	You shall humbly receive your Creator in Holy Communion at least during the Easter season.	3	To confess our sins at least once a year.	3	To study Catholic teachings in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, to be confirmed, and then to continue to study and advance the cause of Christ.
4	You shall keep holy the holy days of obligation.	4	To receive Holy Communion during Easter time.	4	To observe the marriage laws of the Church.
5	You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence.	5	To contribute to the support of the Church.	5	To strengthen and support the Church.
	Not called a precept: The faithful also have the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church each according to his abilities.	6	To observe the laws of the Church concerning marriage.	6	To do penance, including abstaining from meat and fasting from food on the appointed days.
				7	To join in the missionary spirit and apostolate of the Church.

1) To worship God by participating in Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

It hurts Christ tremendously if we do not love Him enough even to assist at Mass on Sunday after all He suffered to give us the Mass.

A Catholic who through his own fault misses Mass on a Sunday or a holy day of obligation commits a mortal sin.

Holy days were instituted by the Church to remind us of the mysteries of our religion and of the important events in the lives of Christ and of His Blessed Mother, and to recall to us the virtues and the rewards of the saints.

The Church obliges us to abstain from servile work on holydays of obligation, just as on Sundays, as far as we are able.

2) To receive Holy Communion frequently and the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly.

Holy Communion is food for the soul. Receiving Holy Communion frequently helps us to keep our souls from the death of the soul, that is, mortal sin.

“I tell you solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you.” Jn 6:53

Regular and frequent reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation greatly helps us to overcome temptation, to keep in the state of grace, and to grow in virtue.

3) To study Catholic teachings in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, to be confirmed, and then to continue to study and advance the cause of Christ.

Confirmation is the sacrament through which the Holy Spirit comes to us in a special way and enables us to profess our faith as strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ in the ever-present battle of virtue, goodness, light and life against sin, evil, darkness and death.

All Catholics should be confirmed in order to be strengthened against the dangers to salvation and to be prepared better to defend their Catholic faith. We are to defend and spread the faith by word and deed.

To receive Confirmation properly it is necessary to be in the state of grace and to know well the chief truths and duties of our religion. These truths and duties are found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*¹, simpler catechisms derived from it, or from previous major Catechisms of the Catholic Church or simpler versions of them, such as the *Baltimore Catechism*².

4) To observe the marriage laws of the Church.

Church laws require a Catholic to be married in the presence of the parish priest or the bishop of the diocese, or a priest delegated by either of them, and two witnesses.

Marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic requires the **express permission** of ecclesiastical authority.

Marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person requires and **express dispensation** from ecclesiastical authority.

The marriage laws of the Church have been instituted to maintain the dignity of marriage as God intended it and to help marriages to succeed.

5) To strengthen and support the Church.

Each of us is to help bear his fair share of the financial needs of the parish, diocese and the Holy See (the seat of authority of the world-wide Church in Rome, under the leadership of the Pope).

Each of us is also called to support the Church with our time and talents, as well as our financial resources.

6) To do penance, including abstaining from meat and fasting from food on the appointed days.

Our Lord expects us to fast. He said, “When you fast...” (Mt 6:16), not “If you fast...”.

Our Lord expects us to do other forms of penance, as well. This means making ourselves do things we don’t feel like doing to control our feelings (the desires of the flesh).

We are commanded to fast and abstain from meat on the appointed days in order that we may better control the desires of the flesh, raise our minds more freely to God, and make satisfaction for sin.

7) To join in the missionary spirit and apostolate of the Church.

Just before He ascended into Heaven Our Lord said: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you." Mt 28:19-20

This **missionary mandate** is a requirement of the Church's essential universality (catholicity). We all have a share in this mandate.

References

- 1) **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, pp. 408, 493-495.
- 2) **Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism**, Official Revised Edition, No. 2, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1962, pp. 133-142.
- 3) **Handbook for Catholics**, Loyola Press and Sisters of Notre Dame, Chardon, Ohio, 1995, p. 46.