

FREE PDF · 3 LESSONS

Free PDF Basic Catechism Course: The Sacraments in 3 Lessons, with the Catechism

With the text of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Confession and the Anointing of the Sick

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How to use this booklet

There are 3 lessons on the sacraments. Each one first gives you the text of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, with the number of every paragraph, and then the same ideas in simple words.

Next come 3 review questions and one small step for the week. The answers are in the answer key at the end: try the questions before you look. To close each lesson, pray the Our Father slowly; it is also at the end, in the words of the Catechism.

Each lesson takes 5 to 8 minutes. One a week is a good pace.

LESSON 1

What is a sacrament? Baptism and Confirmation

Many people were baptized as babies and never had anyone explain, calmly, what happened that day. This lesson starts there: what a sacrament is, and what the Catechism teaches about Baptism and Confirmation.

LESSON 1

What the Catechism says

The 9 paragraphs below are reproduced in full from the Catechism.

§ 1131

The 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.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1131 · vatican.va

§ 1213

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1213 · vatican.va

§ 1257

The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them. Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn of water and the Spirit." God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1257 · vatican.va

§ 1278

The essential rite of Baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water or pouring water on his head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1278 · vatican.va

§ 1279

The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, 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. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1279 · vatican.va

§ 1280

Baptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship. Because of the character Baptism cannot be repeated (cf. DS 1609 and DS 1624).

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1280 · vatican.va

§ 1285

Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the "sacraments of Christian initiation," whose unity must be safeguarded. It must be explained to the faithful that the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace. For "by the sacrament of Confirmation, [the baptized] are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1285 · vatican.va

§ 1316

Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1316 · vatican.va

§ 1320

The essential rite of Confirmation is anointing the forehead of the baptized with sacred chrism (in the East other sense-organs as well), together with the laying on of the minister's hand and the words: "Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti" (Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.) in the Roman Rite, or "The seal of the gift that is the Holy Spirit" in the Byzantine rite.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1320 · vatican.va

LESSON 1

IN SIMPLE WORDS

A sign is something you can see that points to something else, like a hug that says “I love you” without words. The Catechism calls the sacraments efficacious signs: they do not only point to God's grace, they also bring it about. What you see in the rite shows, and at the same time makes real, the grace proper to each sacrament (§ 1131).

The same paragraph ends with a line worth not skipping: the sacraments bear fruit in those who receive them with the right dispositions. A disposition is the inner attitude you bring, like someone receiving a gift with open hands (§ 1131).

Baptism is the door. The Catechism places it at the foundation of the whole Christian life and says it opens the way to the other sacraments (§ 1213). Its essential rite is to immerse the person in water or pour water on their head, calling on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (§ 1278).

What does Baptism give? Forgiveness of original sin and of all personal sins, and a new life: the person becomes an adopted child of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit, and

becomes part of the Church (§ 1279). An adopted child is a child of the house, with a place at the table.

Baptism leaves a spiritual mark on the soul that the Catechism calls a character, and that mark cannot be erased. That is why Baptism is never repeated: it is received only once (§ 1280).

Paragraph 1257 has two parts, and both are worth reading. The first says Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the chance to ask for it. The second says God has bound salvation to Baptism, but He Himself is not bound by His sacraments.

Confirmation completes what Baptism began. Together with Baptism and the Eucharist, it makes up the sacraments of Christian initiation, that is, of entering the Christian life (§ 1285). It does not replace Baptism: it brings baptismal grace to its fullness (§ 1316).

The essential rite of Confirmation is the anointing with sacred chrism, a consecrated oil, on the forehead of the baptized person, with the laying on of the minister's hand and the words of the rite (§ 1320).

LESSON 1

Questions

1. According to the Catechism, what is a sacrament? (a) A family celebration each community makes up as it likes. (b) A sign that brings about God's grace, given by Christ and entrusted to the Church. (c) A prize for good behavior.

2. True or false: according to the Catechism, a person can be baptized several times in life.

3. What is the essential rite of Confirmation? (a) Immersing the person in water. (b) Receiving the consecrated bread and wine. (c) The anointing with chrism on the forehead, with the laying on of the hand and the words of the rite. (d) Signing a written promise before the parish priest.

LESSON 1

For this week

If you are baptized, find out the date of your Baptism. You can ask at home or at the parish where you received it, which usually keeps it in its records. Save it on your phone and, when the day comes, give thanks.

If you are not baptized or not yet confirmed and would like to know more, any parish can guide you.

LESSON 2

The Eucharist and Sunday Mass

Why does Sunday Mass hold such a central place in the life of the Church? This lesson shows what the Eucharist is, when Jesus instituted it, what real presence means, how to prepare for Communion and what the Church asks about Sunday.

LESSON 2

What the Catechism says

The 8 paragraphs below are reproduced in full from the Catechism.

§ 1324

The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1324 · vatican.va

§ 1337

The Lord, having loved those who were his own, loved them to the end. Knowing that the hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father, in the course of a meal he washed their feet and gave them the commandment of love. In order to leave them a pledge of this love, in order never to depart from his own and to make them sharers in his Passover, he instituted the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and Resurrection, and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return; "thereby he constituted them priests of the New Testament."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1337 · vatican.va

§ 1374

The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend." In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained." "This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1374 · vatican.va

§ 1377

The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1377 · vatican.va

§ 1385

To respond to this invitation we must prepare ourselves for so great and so holy a moment. St. Paul urges us to examine our conscience: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1385 · vatican.va

§ 1389

The Church obliges the faithful "to take part in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and feast days" and, prepared by the sacrament of Reconciliation, to receive the Eucharist at least once a year, if possible during the Easter season. But the Church strongly encourages the faithful to receive the holy Eucharist on Sundays and feast days, or more often still, even daily.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1389 · vatican.va

§ 2180

The precept of the Church specifies the law of the Lord more precisely: "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass." "The precept of participating in the Mass is satisfied by assistance at a Mass which is celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the holy day or on the evening of the preceding day."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 2180 · vatican.va

§ 2181

The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 2181 · vatican.va

LESSON 2

IN SIMPLE WORDS

The Catechism says the Eucharist is the source and the high point of the whole Christian life (§ 1324). Source, like the spring the water comes from; high point, like the summit of a mountain.

Jesus instituted it during a meal with His disciples, knowing that the hour had come for Him to leave this world. He made it the memorial of His death and Resurrection and told the apostles to celebrate it until He comes again (§ 1337).

Christ's presence in the Eucharist, the Catechism says, is true, real and substantial: the whole Christ is there (§ 1374). Calling it real does not mean that the other ways Christ is present are not real; it means this one is real in the fullest sense.

This presence begins at the consecration and lasts as long as the consecrated bread and wine remain. Christ is whole in each of them and in each of their parts: breaking the bread does not divide Christ (§ 1377).

Receiving Communion calls for preparation. Saint Paul asks everyone to examine themselves first, and the Catechism says that anyone aware of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to Communion (§ 1385). To examine yourself is to look honestly at your own life. Reconciliation, or Confession, is the topic of Lesson 3.

Going to Mass and receiving Communion are not the same thing. The Church asks the faithful to take part in Mass on Sundays and feast days and to receive the Eucharist at least once a year, if possible during the Easter season, prepared by Reconciliation. And it strongly encourages receiving Communion on Sundays, or even more often (§ 1389).

On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are bound to take part in Mass. You fulfill this by attending a Mass celebrated in a Catholic rite, on the day itself or on the evening before (§ 2180).

Someone with a serious reason, such as illness or caring for small children, is excused, and one's own pastor can grant a dispensation. Missing Mass on purpose, without a reason, is a grave sin, the Catechism says (§ 2181).

LESSON 2

Questions

1. True or false: Jesus instituted the Eucharist during a meal with His disciples, when He knew the hour had come to leave this world.

2. According to the Catechism, when should you take part in Mass? (a) Only at Christmas and Easter. (b) On Sundays and holy days of obligation, unless there is a serious reason or a dispensation from your pastor. (c) Only on Holy Thursday.

3. Someone aware of a grave sin, before receiving Communion, should… (a) Receive without preparing, since there is no need to examine oneself. (b) Wait until next Christmas. (c) Receive the sacrament of Reconciliation first.

LESSON 2

For this week

This Sunday, arrive at Mass five minutes early and stay in silence for a moment before it begins. If it has been a while since you last went, look up the Mass times of the nearest parish and choose a Mass you can reach without rushing.

LESSON 3

Confession and the Anointing of the Sick

What really happens in Confession, and who is the Anointing of the Sick for? Few people talk about these two sacraments, and sometimes they frighten people only because no one explained them. At the end, two paragraphs introduce Holy Orders and Matrimony.

LESSON 3

What the Catechism says

The 9 paragraphs below are reproduced in full from the Catechism.

§ 1441

Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1441 · vatican.va

§ 1442

Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry which he charged with the "ministry of reconciliation." The apostle is sent out "on behalf of Christ" with "God making his appeal" through him and pleading: "Be reconciled to God."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1442 · vatican.va

§ 1450

"Penance requires . . . the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1450 · vatican.va

§ 1467

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives. This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the "sacramental seal," because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains "sealed" by the sacrament.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1467 · vatican.va

§ 1514

The Anointing of the Sick "is not a sacrament for those only who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as anyone of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the fitting time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1514 · vatican.va

§ 1520

A particular gift of the Holy Spirit. the first grace of this sacrament is one of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness or the frailty of old age. This grace is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who renews trust and faith in God and strengthens against the temptations of the evil one, the temptation to discouragement and anguish in the face of death. This assistance from the Lord by the power of his Spirit is meant to lead the sick person to healing of the soul, but also of the body if such is God's will. Furthermore, "if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1520 · vatican.va

§ 1536

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate.

(On the institution and mission of the apostolic ministry by Christ, see above, no. 874 ff. Here only the sacramental means by which this ministry is handed on will be treated.)

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1536 · vatican.va

§ 1601

"The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1601 · vatican.va

§ 1638

"From a valid marriage arises a bond between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state by a special sacrament."

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 1638 · vatican.va

LESSON 3

IN SIMPLE WORDS

The first thing the Catechism says about forgiveness is that only God forgives sins. Jesus, the Son of God, has this power and gives it to men so that they exercise it in His name (§ 1441).

Christ entrusted this power to absolve to the ministry of the apostles, who act in His name (§ 1442). To absolve means to loosen, to set free, to forgive. That is why the priest does not forgive on his own authority: he forgives in the name of Christ.

For their part, those who go to Confession bring three things, which the Catechism sums up as heart, lips and deeds: sincere sorrow for sin, telling one's sins, and making amends for the harm done, with

humility (§ 1450).

What is said in Confession stays sealed. Every priest who hears confessions must keep absolute secrecy about the sins confessed to him, with no exception. This is the sacramental seal (§ 1467).

The Anointing of the Sick is not only for those about to die. The right time to receive it is when a person begins to be in danger of death from illness or old age (§ 1514).

The first grace of the Anointing is strength, peace and courage in serious illness or the frailty of old age. This help from the Lord seeks to lead the sick person to healing of the soul, and also of the body if that is God's will; and if they have committed sins, those sins will be forgiven (§ 1520).

Two more sacraments appear in the last paragraphs: Holy Orders (§ 1536), through which the mission Christ gave His apostles continues in the Church, and Matrimony (§ 1601), the covenant by which a man and a woman form a partnership for their whole life. Paragraph 1638 speaks of a bond between the spouses that is perpetual and exclusive: exclusive means only between the two of them.

LESSON 3

Questions

1. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, who forgives sins? (a) The priest, on his own authority. (b) The family of the person confessing. (c) God, through the ministry of the priest, who absolves in the name of Christ.

2. True or false: the priest may tell what he heard in Confession if he thinks it would help.

3. Who can receive the Anointing of the Sick? (a) Someone who begins to be in danger of death from illness or old age. (b) Only someone who is already dying. (c) Only someone who has fully recovered from an illness.

LESSON 3

For this week

Look up the confession times of a parish near you and save them on your phone. And if someone in your family begins to be in danger of death from illness or old age, ask at the parish about the Anointing of the Sick.

Closing prayer: the Our Father

To close each lesson, pray the Our Father slowly. It is printed below as the Catechism gives it in paragraph 2759, with the words that introduce it.

§ 2759

Jesus "was praying at a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" In response to this request the Lord entrusts to his disciples and to his Church the fundamental Christian prayer. St. Luke presents a brief text of five petitions, while St. Matthew gives a more developed version of seven petitions. The liturgical tradition of the Church has retained St. Matthew's text:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 2759 · vatican.va

Answer key

Lesson 1 · 1: (b). It is the definition of a sacrament in § 1131.

Lesson 1 · 2: False. Baptism leaves a mark that cannot be erased, so it is never repeated (§ 1280).

Lesson 1 · 3: (c). It is the rite described in § 1320; immersion in water belongs to Baptism (§ 1278).

Lesson 2 · 1: True. Jesus instituted the Eucharist at a meal, as the memorial of His death and Resurrection (§ 1337).

Lesson 2 · 2: (b). The obligation is in § 2180, and who is excused is in § 2181.

Lesson 2 · 3: (c). That is what § 1385 asks.

Lesson 3 · 1: (c). Only God forgives sins (§ 1441), and the priest absolves in the name of Christ (§ 1442).

Lesson 3 · 2: False. The secrecy is absolute and has no exception: it is the sacramental seal (§ 1467).

Lesson 3 · 3: (a). The Anointing is not only for those about to die (§ 1514).

About this material

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