

WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE

Opening Prayer

Acts 15: 1-20

Materials

Catholicism (*Companion on the Journey* – CJ – Handout)

Responding to the Great Mysteries (*On the Journey* – Doctrine Handout)

The Creed (OJ – Special Topics Handout)

Purgatory (OJ – Doctrine Handout)

The Real Presence (OJ – Doctrine Handout)

Resurrection of the Body (OJ – Doctrine Handout)

The Universal Call to Holiness (OJ Catechetical Session)

- Within each human being is the God-given striving for something beyond this life. A desire for happiness that no created thing can consistently fulfill.
- Holiness means being a truly authentic human being, and thus Christ-like, conforming ourselves to his example.
- Jesus is our gateway to faith. When we surrender ourselves to the Lord and trust the rest of our life to him, we will find peace.

What Does It Mean to be a Catholic? (From *Catholicism* by Fr. Richard McBrien ©1994 ISBN 0-06-065405-8)

- Why is the Church called “Catholic?” According to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, it is called Catholic because it extends throughout the world and because it teaches the same universal truths everywhere, to all peoples.
- Aren’t all Christian religions basically the same? How does Catholicism differ? Catholicism is distinguished from other Christian religions in these areas:
 - **Sacramentality.** A Catholic is taught to see God in all things: other people, events, communities, objects and the world at large. A sacrament is an outward sign of an inner sacredness, instituted by Jesus. The great sacrament of our encounter with almighty God is Jesus, his only Son. The sacrament of our encounter with Jesus is the Church. For Catholics, the world is essentially good, though fallen, because it comes from God, who does not cause or create evil.

- **Mediation.** Mediation refers to a person or experience *in between* two persons or groups. We come to God through our experiences of things beyond us, like a beautiful sunset or the innocence of young children. These things are mediated by our senses, other people or events. Jesus is, of course, the principal mediator – he pleads for us at God’s right hand. Beyond that, and from a more limited view, all of creation can be a mediator, or a bridge between us and God. God has entered into time and human history through the biblical prophets, through the Blessed Virgin Mary and most importantly, through her son, Jesus.
- **Communion.** Catholics do not believe in only “Jesus and me.” There is no relationship with God that is not properly somehow connected to God and to other people. We are a communion of believers, united by the Holy Spirit into a faith community, or what Catholics call a “parish.” This concept springs from the Two Greatest Commandments told to us by Jesus himself: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and, Love you neighbor as you love yourself.* There are a number of acceptable ways to worship God as a Catholic, from pilgrimages, to Sunday Mass to Eucharistic Adoration to contemplative prayer; Catholicism is a big tent. It is this “embracing” ethic, a “both-and” instead of “either-or” that marks Catholicism. It isn’t one thing only.
- **Tradition** Over 2,000 years of teaching from the Apostles to the early Church Fathers to our present day Pope and Bishops has kept the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, true to the teachings of Jesus. It is the traditions of our liturgy, the saints and our prayers that has helped spread the Good News, which is the main reason the Church exists: to spread the Gospel.
- **Reason** St. Anselm of Canterbury, a 12th century theologian, came up with the motto: *fides quaerens intellectum*: faith seeks understanding. This means something like “an active love of God seeking a deeper knowledge of God.” From earliest times, the Church has fostered studies in philosophy and theology, with the belief that once one comes to belief in God, that belief can be deepened and broadened through learning and knowledge.
- **Social Justice** The Church has always fostered and spoken out in favor of the poor, the defenseless, the sinner, the underdog and the outcast. This is because Jesus taught us that it was those people who were most in need of healing. Thus, the Church stands squarely against abortion, mercy killing, and capital punishment and in favor of a living wage, education for all, justice for minorities and immigrants and the fair sharing of goods and property among all, not just those who have power or wealth.
“Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine,
There’s always laughter and good red wine.
At least I’ve always found it so.
Benedicamus Domino!”
— Hilaire Belloc