

Religious education starts this weekend so it seems like a good time to do two things: bless our catechists and review some things you have been taught but may have forgotten, specifically the five precepts of the Church. Ordinarily the blessing of the catechists would follow the homily, but I am including it as part of the homily to make a point which will hopefully become crystal clear as we proceed.

All parish catechists, please stand up: this includes employees and volunteers who are involved in adult and children religious education, RCIA and the Newman Center. You all have been given the **formal** responsibility of teaching the faith here in the parish. Now, all parents please stand up—whether you are currently raising children or your children are adults. You are the primary catechists or teachers of the faith. The family is the domestic church. You have the responsibility of making sure what is taught here in the church is reinforced and lived at home. Now everyone else please stand up. All of us are catechists because we teach the faith according to how we live our lives. Have you ever had someone come up to you and say, “I thought as a Catholic you couldn’t do this or you promised to do that.” We teach people about our faith by the way we live out our faith in our lives. Are we good teachers of the faith? Because we are all catechists and we need to support each other in our own individual ministries as teachers of the faith, I am going to give the catechist blessing to everyone.
[Blessing]

In order to teach the faith, we must know the faith and we must know and carry out the responsibilities that come with claiming to be disciples of Jesus. Let’s look at the five precepts of the Church. They can be found in the catechism: CCC 2041-2043. These precepts apply to all baptized Catholics. I will do them in reverse order.

The fifth precept: You shall help to provide for the material needs of the church according to our ability. This applies to supporting the financial needs of the parish as well as in serving its various ministries. Both are extremely important but I will go more in depth on both of these another time. One material need that might not be thought of in those terms is clergy. No priest, no Eucharist. Do you want priests so you can have daily Mass every day? Do you want a priest to always be available for emergencies and all of the other things you expect your priests to do? Do you want deacons to help with baptisms and weddings and blessings and the tons of other things our deacons do? Encourage and support vocations to the priesthood and diaconate within your families. If you come from a Latino or Vietnamese or another cultural background: do you want

priests and deacons who understand your culture and language? Those priests and deacons have to come from within your families so encourage vocations to the priesthood and diaconate at home.

The fourth precept: Observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church. In the United States, we abstain from meat and fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. We abstain from meat on the Fridays of Lent. This is to honor Jesus' sacrifice of his body and blood as the price for our redemption. We also fast for one hour before receiving Holy Communion. Friday's outside of Lent are also penitential days on which we make some sort of sacrifice of our own choosing. Choose a penitential practice which will help you to overcome temptation and grow in your will power. This is about honoring Jesus' sacrifice, so do something worthy of the cross.

The third precept: You shall receive the Eucharist at least once during the Easter season. This is directly tied to the second precept: You shall confess your sins at least once a year. We must be in a state of grace to receive the Eucharist. Both of these—confessing once and receiving Communion once a year—are extremely low bars. Frequent confession and frequently receiving the Eucharist will help us more fully receive the graces God wants to give us. Sometimes people complain that going to Confession on Saturdays is inconvenient; I am not referring to people who work on Saturdays. The next time giving up two out of 52 Saturday afternoons feels like an unreasonable inconvenience, think about what Jesus had to do so that we can have access to that sacrament.

Which brings us to the first precept: You shall attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Vigil masses count towards that obligation but you still need to keep Sunday and other Holy Days holy. Anything that interferes with our sanctification of those days should be avoided. Some people are required to work on Sundays; try to go to Mass on Saturday night or go to our Sunday evening Mass. We also have a 5 pm Mass here on Sunday evenings. Extreme weather, illness, and unavoidable travel are other reasons why you can excuse yourself from Mass. Fulfilling this precept is one that can speak volumes to our families, friends, and neighbors. For example, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati loved to climb mountains, but if mountain climbing meant he couldn't go to Mass on Sunday, he wouldn't go mountain climbing. He often found a way to do both and he brought his friends to Mass with him. His no-compromise attitude about attending Mass had a huge positive impact on his family and friends later on. The seriousness—or casualness—with which we take our duty to gather together as a community to worship and praise and thank God every Sunday will have an

effect on the people around us. We might lead people closer to God or we might lead them further away.

Those are the five precepts of the Church. The way we live them out speaks volumes about our love for Jesus. Do we do the bare minimum or are we generous in our response to Jesus? Keeping the precepts does require sacrifice. The next time those sacrifices start to bother us, we must look at the Cross and remember how generous Jesus has been in his response to us, even when we don't deserve his generosity. Jesus allowed himself to be tortured and put to death for each one of us because he loves us. Is Jesus really asking too much of us in return?