

The 5 Precepts of the Catholic Church (start with Fr. Mike video-link on website)

The *5 Precepts of the Catholic Church* are a description of the **absolute minimum** actions required of Catholics regarding our participation in the life of the Church. The Church uses these precepts remind us that Christian life requires a commitment to prayer and active participation in the liturgy and sacraments. If we fall below this bare-minimum level, we can't rightly consider ourselves to be "practicing Catholics" living in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Each of these precepts of the Catholic Church is a requirement for our lives. Together with the Ten Commandments, they represent the minimum level of moral living. Once a Catholic has been taught and has awareness of these precepts or the 10 Commandments, the intentional violation of them is considered *grave matter*, meaning a mortal sin, in need of the healing of the sacrament of Confession.

The 5 Precepts

1. ***You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation & rest from servile labor.***

We must "sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord" (Sunday), as well as the principal feast days, known as Catholic **holy days of obligation**. This requires attending Mass, "and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days."

2. ***You shall confess your sins at least once a year (& after committing mortal sins)***

We must prepare for the Eucharist by means of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). This sacrament "continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness."

3. ***You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.***

This "guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy."

4. ***You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.***

"The fourth precept ensures the times of asceticism and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart." *See notes on the back of this sheet for more about fasting & abstinence.*

5. ***You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.***

"The fifth precept means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability."

(These quotations are from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in its section about the [Precepts of the Catholic Church](#) (#2041-3).)

Note that these precepts of the Catholic Church are required, **unless** you have a legitimate reason for not meeting them. For example:

- *If you are sick, tending to a sick child, a vehicle breaks down on the way, you rely on someone else to bring you to Mass and have no means to attend on your own, or are in a location where Mass is not accessible (i.e. a wilderness backpacking trip), it is not a grave violation to miss Mass that day.*
- *Children, the elderly, and pregnant or nursing women do not have to fast on normal fast days (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).*

More about fasting & abstinence

One of the precepts of the Catholic Church requires fasting & abstinence as signs of repentance. **Repentance** means to turn away from sin and turn back to God. The Catholic Church has two official forms of penitential practices: fasting and abstinence. These are so important that they're one of the precepts of the Catholic Church.

Fasting is reducing the amount of food you eat below normal levels. Specifically, on fast days you may eat one full meal and two smaller meals, but those two smaller together should not exceed the amount of the normal meal. Snacking is also prohibited on fast days.

All Catholics age 18 to 59 are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. You are excused from fasting if you have a *legitimate need* to eat a normal amount of food on fast days. This includes:

- *The sick or infirmed, including handicapped or mentally ill people who need the nourishment or cannot make a free choice to fast*
- *Pregnant or nursing women*
- *Some manual laborers*

Abstinence means not eating meat (fish is not considered meat in this case). All Catholics 14 and older are required to observe abstinence on these days:

- *Ash Wednesday, Good Friday (the Friday before Easter), and all Fridays in Lent.*
- *It is still strongly recommended to observe Friday abstinence outside of Lent, but Catholics **may** choose to substitute another penitential practice or act of charity for these days.*

Note that the **duty** to perform the tasks of your state in life takes precedence over the law of fasting in the precepts of the Catholic Church. If fasting honestly causes you to be unable to fulfill your required tasks, it is uncharitable to fast — the law of fasting would not apply in this case. (Consult with a priest if this is a concern to you.)

Parent & Candidate Commitment

Which of these 5 precepts would we like to focus on during the coming month?

(For example... If attending Sunday Mass hasn't been a priority, make a commitment to go every Sunday until our next Confirmation Prep Session! If you haven't been to Confession in a long time, make it a priority to go together.)

What is one concrete way that we can help each other honor this commitment?

We invite you to hang this sheet up on your refrigerator or in a common space to help you remember your commitment this month!