

The Precepts of the Church

There are five precepts of the Catholic Church. A precept is a command or general rule of actions. The Catholic Church gives us five precepts as a starting point on the path to holiness to help us grow in love of God and neighbor. These five laws of the Church are described by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2041 in this way:

The precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor.



The First Precept

The First Precept of the Church is to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; and resting from servile works.

The first precept calls us to give God His due by setting aside time to worship Him each



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- › Set in the context of the moral life
- › Nourished by liturgical life and prayer
- › Minimum requirements for growth in love of God and neighbor

week by going to Mass. This is also the Third Commandment. From this precept flows our call to sanctity through developing a life of prayer and our need to give God the worship He is due. We are also called to rest from unnecessary labor on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. Just as God rested on the 7th day and made Creation holy, we are called to praise God for the many blessings He has given us by resting and enjoying the fruits of our labor and spending time with loved ones.



The Second Precept

The Second Precept of the Church is to confess our sins to a priest, at least once a year.

We are required to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year. However, we can receive this Sacrament as often as we need to in order to overcome sin in our lives. A good practice is to strive to go to Confession once a month. The Sacrament of Reconciliation not only forgives us of all mortal and venial sins, but it also gives us the grace to avoid sin in the future. Holiness and sanctity require us to be completely detached from sin. The more often we go to Confession the more detached from sin we become.



The Third Precept

The Third Precept of the Church is to receive Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season.

We must receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season. This is because during the Easter season we celebrate the Paschal feasts which are “the origin and center of the Christian liturgy” (CCC 2042). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the Eucharist the “source and summit of the Christian life.” With this in mind, why wouldn’t we seek to receive the Eucharist more than this? If we truly believe the Eucharist is the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, then it only makes sense to desire to receive Him more often. If we are truly striving for holiness, we should do everything we can to receive Him at least once a week and given the opportunity, more frequently than that.



The Fourth Precept

The Fourth Precept of the Church is to observe the days of abstinence and fasting.

The Church asks us to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Fasting is defined as two small meals that do not add up to one regular meal, and one normal meal. Christ and His Church also teach us that fasting is an effective way of combating different sins, an effective way of offering up sufferings for others, and can assist one in growing

in the virtue of temperance. One can “fast” from other things besides food. For example, during Lent, one might choose to “fast” from candy or video games. Abstinence means to abstain from eating meat. The Church calls us to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, all Fridays during Lent, and Good Friday. Traditionally Catholics are called to abstain from meat on all Fridays throughout the year (except on solemnities that occur on a Friday). That tradition has changed. If we do not abstain from meat on Fridays, however, we are called to perform some alternate penance in commemoration of the Lord’s Passion.

The Fifth Precept

The Fifth Precept of the Church is to contribute to the support of the Church.

The *Catechism* no. 2043 explains that “The faithful also have the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church, each according to his abilities.” In the early Church community, entire churches were built by the communities that they were in. People gave of their time, talent, and treasure to build the



church buildings and sustain them. We are called to do the same today. Everything we receive is a gift from God. As a response to God’s gift, we are called to give a portion back to Him because it came from Him. Each of us is called to pray about and discern how we can contribute to the material needs of the Church.

The Five Precepts of the Church are a basic framework of what is required for the Christian life. They unite our moral, Christian life with the liturgy, which nourishes us. However, this is the barest minimum. How can we better live out each of the precepts in order to not only be considered a Christian but to become saints?