SESSION 6

The Precepts of the Church

What students will learn:
- The precepts of the Church present the bare minimum required for Christian living.
- Because we know the Church will endure forever, we know that saints are still being made today.
- Jesus calls us all to be saints.

What students will do:
- Review scenarios where characters perform the bare minimum.
- Do an in-depth study of the precepts of the Church.
- Identify scenarios where the precepts of the Church are being upheld or broken.
- Prayerfully reflect on which precept of the Church they struggle with the most.
Vocabulary your students will learn:

- **Precepts of the Church (n.):** The minimum of what is required of us for Christian living.
  
  The precepts are: to attend Mass and to rest from servile work on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, to confess our sins to a priest at least once a year, to receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season, to observe the days of abstinence and fasting, and to contribute to the support of the Church. These precepts unite our moral, Christian life with the liturgy, which nourishes us.

Workbook pages your students will complete:

- The Bare Minimum (page 44)
- The Precepts of the Church (page 46)
- Identifying the Precepts of the Church (page 50)
- Living the Precepts of the Church (page 51)

Other materials you will need:

- Poster board or butcher paper
- Markers and/or colored pencils

Prayer for this session:

Dear Lord Jesus, you were perfectly obedient to your Father in Heaven and to your earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. Your obedience allowed God's will to be done here on earth and brought about our salvation from sin. Help me to be always obedient to the will of our Father and to my parents and to all those whom God has placed in authority in my life, so that your glory may be known throughout the world. Amen.
Session Plan
Choose from a warm-up and activities.

Warm-Up

A. Begin with the prayer for this session.

B. Have students turn to The Bare Minimum (page 44) and read the scenarios with a partner. Then have them answer the questions together.

C. When your students have completed the worksheet, review and discuss the answers as a class. Then ask your students:

- In each of these scenarios, the people did the bare minimum to get by. Did this get the job done? Yes, to a degree.
- How could they have gotten better results if they did more? The football players could have maybe won the state championship instead of just having an okay season; Allison could have gotten the lead in the school musical by the time she was a senior instead of just continuing to be in the chorus; Mark could have saved enough money to buy his own car or pay for some of his college instead of just making enough money to get by.

EXPLAIN to your students that now we are going to begin discussing the precepts of the Church. These are the minimum of what Christ and the Church requires of us to be practicing Catholics. These are merely the starting point, however, to get us on the path to holiness. We are called to be holy and to become saints. If we are going to achieve holiness, then more is required of us.

The Bare Minimum
Directions: Read each of the following scenarios and answer the questions that follow.

Scenario 1: The Vikings
The Sacred Heart School Vikings are a football team made up of a group of naturally talented and athletic guys. They practice only three days a week, as opposed to other teams in the area that practice five days a week. The Vikings' practices are only 45 minutes long and they only lift and run weights once every week. The Vikings all enjoy playing but usually win only a few games each season. They have never made it to the playoffs or won a state championship.

1. Do the Vikings still meet all the requirements of a football team? _____________________________

2. Would you want to be a part of that team? Why or why not? ______________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

Scenario 2: Allison
Allison is a young girl who attends St. Joseph’s Academy. She is an actress and has a lot of natural talent. All of the other actresses and performers in her school are taking acting classes, and some of them even enroll in private voice lessons. Allison doesn’t do any of these things. She simply relies on her natural talent when she auditions for school plays and musicals. She has barely even made the chorus, and has auditioned for a lead role in every show. She has never been cast in a lead role.

3. Can you still consider Allison an actress? ____________________________________________________

4. Is she the best actress she could be? Why or why not? ________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

Scenario 3: Mark
Mark is a young man who attends All Saints School in Florida. Last summer, Mark’s parents told him he had to get a job, so he started his own lawn-mowing business. He got the idea from a friend of his who started his own mowing business. Mark had only five customers that summer and didn’t do anything to promote himself or his business. He made enough money to be able to go out with his friends on the weekend, but he never saved any money.

5. Did Mark get a job as his parents asked him? __________________________________________________

6. Did he make the most out of the opportunity? Why or why not? ________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________

SESSION 6: THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH
Activity 1

A. Have your students turn to **The Precepts of the Church (page 46)** and go over the essay together as a class. Then have students answer the questions and review their responses as a class.

B. Arrange students into groups of three or four and distribute poster board or butcher paper and markers and/or colored pencils to each group. Have each group create a cartoon, drawing, or symbol that represents each of the precepts. They should use no words but only pictures and symbols to represent each precept.

C. After your students have completed their drawings, have each of the groups share their posters with the class.

Activity 2

A. Ask students to turn to **Identifying the Precepts of the Church (page 50)**. Have them individually complete the worksheet by reading the scenarios and identifying which precept of the Church is being violated or upheld.

B. When your students have completed the worksheet, review and discuss the answers as a class.
Activity 3

A. Read aloud to your students *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2013:

“All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.” All are called to holiness: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gift, so that... doing the will of the Father in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the People of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church through the lives of so many saints.

B. Ask your students the following questions:

- What are all Christians called to? The fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity – holiness.
- Whom does Jesus tell us to be perfect as? Our Heavenly Father.
- How do we strive to reach this perfection? By using the strength given to us by Christ’s gift (of salvation and grace) to do the will of the Father in everything and by devoting ourselves to the glory of God and service of our neighbor.
- What has the history of the Church shown through the lives of the saints? The holiness of the People of God.

**EXPLAIN** to your students that each and every one of us is called to holiness. The Church calls this the universal call to holiness. This is our primary vocation – to be holy. Whether we are called to marriage, religious life, or ordained priesthood, every one of us must seek to be holy and to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. How do we do this? Jesus Himself and the lives of the saints throughout the history of the Church provide the road map to holiness for us. Jesus and the saints each bore witness to the truth, and many gave their lives for the truth. In this is holiness. Today, perhaps more than ever before, the world is in need of people to stand up for the truth and to actively seek holiness. The world still needs saints, which we are all called to be.

C. Create a prayerful atmosphere in the room and have students turn to *Living the Precepts of the Church* (page 51). Encourage students to thoughtfully and prayerfully respond to the questions and let them know that they will keep their essay private.
Get Ready for the Next Session

- Prepare a list of various Marian feasts and the feast days of various saints and martyrs for students to mark on their liturgical calendars. Some resources may be found here: SophiaOnline.org/FeastDaysofMary and SophiaOnline.org/Saints.

- Prepare the Online video “Turn, Turn, Turn” by the Byrds found at SophiaOnline.org/Turn.

- Bring writing paper, and red, green, purple, and yellow colored pencils or markers as well as blue, red, and black pens.

- Review the upcoming session.
The Bare Minimum

Directions:  Read each of the following scenarios and answer the questions that follow.

Scenario 1: The Vikings

The Sacred Heart School Vikings are a football team made up of a great group of naturally talented and athletic guys. They practice only three days a week, as opposed to other teams in the area that practice five days a week. The Vikings’ practices are only 45 minutes long, and they run laps and lift weights only once a week. The other teams in the area practice for 2 hours and run laps and lift weights every day. The Vikings all enjoy playing but usually win only a few games each season. They have never made it to the playoffs or won a state championship.

1. Do the Vikings still meet all the requirements of a football team? _____________________________

2. Would you want to be a part of that team? Why or why not?
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

Scenario 2: Allison

Allison is a young girl who attends St. Joseph’s Academy. She is an actress and has a lot of natural talent. All of the other actors and actresses at her school are taking acting classes, are enrolled in choir, and take private voice lessons. Allison doesn’t do any of these things. She simply relies on her natural talent when she auditions for school plays and musicals. She has been cast in every show she has auditioned for, but only in small bit parts or in the chorus. She has never been cast in a lead role.

3. Can you still consider Allison an actress? _____________________________

4. Is she the best actress she could be? Why or why not?
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

Answer Key

Scenario 1

1. Yes.

2. No, they aren’t trying very hard to win and be the best team they can be. Accept additional reasoned answers.

Scenario 2

3. Yes.

4. No, she could have done much more to hone her skills and talents. She may have been able to get a lead role if she took lessons and worked on improving her natural abilities.
Scenario 3: Mark

Mark is a young man who attends All Saints School in Florida. Last summer, Mark's parents told him he had to get a job, so he started his own lawn-mowing business. He got the idea from a friend of his who started his own mowing business. Mark had only five customers that summer and didn't do anything to promote himself or his business. He made enough money to be able to go out with his friends on the weekend, but he never saved any money. Mark's friend promoted himself, had twenty customers, and made enough money not only to go out with his friends but also to save enough to buy himself a car and to put money away for college.

5. Did Mark get a job as his parents asked him? ________________________________

6. Did he make the most out of the opportunity? Why or why not?

______________________________________________________________

Answer Key

Scenario 3

5. Yes.

6. No, he could have worked harder, made more money, saved money, and been in a better place financially by the time he graduated high school.
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 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?
The Precepts of the Church

Fill in the blanks:
- Set in the context of the ________________________________
- Nourished by ________________________________
- ________________________________ requirements for growth in love of ________________________________ and ________________________________

What are the Precepts of the Church? Define each precept.

1. ________________________________
   ________________________________
2. ________________________________
   ________________________________
3. ________________________________
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4. ________________________________
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5. ________________________________
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What are the Precepts of the Church? Defining each precept:

1. To attend Mass and rest from servile work on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.

2. To confess our sins to a priest, at least once a year.

3. To receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist at least once a year during Easter season.

4. To observe the days of abstinence and fasting.

5. To contribute to the support of the Church.
Identifying the Precepts of the Church

Directions: Read each of the following scenarios and identify which precept of the Church is being upheld or violated.

Precepts of the Church
A. To attend Mass and rest from servile work on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
B. To confess our sins to a priest, at least once a year.
C. To receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist at least once a year during Easter season.
D. To observe the days of abstinence and fasting.
E. To contribute to the support of the Church.

1. Mark is out with his friends on Good Friday. They go to a fast-food restaurant. He really doesn't like the fish sandwich so he decides to order a burger.
2. Cory goes to Mass every Sunday with his family and often tries to go to daily Mass once or twice a week on his own.
3. Theresa does not like going to Confession. She hasn't been in over five years.
4. Andrew works hard as a waiter on the weekends. Every Sunday at Mass, he gives 8 percent of the tips he has earned that weekend to the Church.
5. Colleen is in love with the gift of the Eucharist. She feels so blessed to be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist every week.
6. Brady and his family attend Mass only on Christmas and Easter.
7. Michael goes to Confession every other Saturday.
8. Steven makes $100,000 a year. He works hard for his money and doesn't think he should give anything to the Church or anyone else.
Living the Precepts of the Church

Directions: Write a reflection that addresses the following questions.

› What is one precept of the Church you struggle with most? Why?
› What are three ways you can strive to live it more perfectly?
› Write a prayer asking Jesus to give you the strength and understanding to live this precept and learn to grow in holiness.

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Accept reasoned answers
The Bare Minimum

Directions: Read each of the following scenarios and answer the questions that follow.

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1. Do the Vikings still meet all the requirements of a football team? ____________________________

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4. Is she the best actress she could be? Why or why not?
   _________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________________________________
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5. Did Mark get a job as his parents asked him? ____________________________________________

6. Did he make the most out of the opportunity? Why or why not?

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_____________________________________________________________________________________

SESSION 6: THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH
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**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 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.
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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.

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The Precepts of the Church

Fill in the blanks:

› Set in the context of the __________________________.
› Nourished by __________________________.
› __________________________ requirements for growth in love of __________________________
  and __________________________.

What are the Precepts of the Church? Define each precept.

1. __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

2. __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

3. __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

4. __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

5. __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
Identifying the Precepts of the Church

Directions: Read each of the following scenarios and identify which precept of the Church is being upheld or violated.

Precepts of the Church
A. To attend Mass and rest from servile work on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
B. To confess our sins to a priest, at least once a year.
C. To receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist at least once a year during Easter season.
D. To observe the days of abstinence and fasting.
E. To contribute to the support of the Church.

1. Mark is out with his friends on Good Friday. They go to a fast-food restaurant. He really doesn’t like the fish sandwich so he decides to order a burger.

2. Cory goes to Mass every Sunday with his family and often tries to go to daily Mass once or twice a week on his own.

3. Theresa does not like going to Confession. She hasn’t been in over five years.

4. Andrew works hard as a waiter on the weekends. Every Sunday at Mass, he gives 8 percent of the tips he has earned that weekend to the Church.

5. Colleen is in love with the gift of the Eucharist. She feels so blessed to be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist every week.

6. Brady and his family attend Mass only on Christmas and Easter.

7. Michael goes to Confession every other Saturday.

8. Steven makes $100,000 a year. He works hard for his money and doesn’t think he should give anything to the Church or anyone else.
Directions: Write a reflection that addresses the following questions.

› What is one precept of the Church you struggle with most? Why?
› What are three ways you can strive to live it more perfectly?
› Write a prayer asking Jesus to give you the strength and understanding to live this precept and learn to grow in holiness.