

What does it mean to be a practicing Catholic?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes “the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor” in what are known as the precepts of the Church (CCC § 2041-2043). Here are the minimum actions necessary for someone to be considered a practicing Catholic.

Precept 1: “To attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation and to refrain from work and activities which could impede the sanctification of those days.”

- “The first precept (**“You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.”**) requires the faithful to sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord,” Sunday, “as well as the principal liturgical feasts honoring the mysteries of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints; in the first place, by participating in the Eucharistic celebration, in which the Christian community is gathered, and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days.” By sanctification, the Church means to make holy or set apart for God. This participation is one of the heart, not necessarily receiving holy communion at every mass attended, rather one should prayerfully unite their heart to the Lord while physically attending the mass.
- In the USA these holy days of obligation are:
 - *Every Sunday of the Year*
 - *The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God* on January 1st
 - *The Solemnity of the Ascension* on Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter
 - *The Solemnity of All Saints* on November 1st
 - *The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception* on December 8th
 - *The Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ* on December 25th
- **Note:** Whenever January 1, August 15, or November 1, fall on a Saturday or on a Monday the precept to attend mass is abrogated (meaning removed). In some dioceses the Solemnity of the Ascension is celebrated on the Seventh Sunday of Easter, but the Archdiocese of Omaha celebrates on the traditional Thursday date.

Precept 2: “To confess one’s sins, receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once each year.”

- “The second precept (**“You shall confess your sins at least once a year.”**) ensures preparation for the Eucharist by the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, which

continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness." The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* clarifies that this is "in particular for those who are conscious of serious sin."

Precept 3: "To receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season."

- "The third precept ("**You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.**") 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." The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* clarifies that "in the United States, this extends from the First Sunday of Lent to Trinity Sunday. Because the Holy Eucharist is both the source and summit of life for all in the Church, the Church teaches that every member for his or her own good must receive Communion minimally at least once a year."

Precept 4: "To abstain from eating meat and to observe the days of fasting established by the Church."

- "The fourth precept ("**You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.**") 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." By asceticism the Church means personal acts of self-denial intended to help one grow in their relationship with God. By penance the Church means actions done in reparation for sin. The special dates and times are to prepare the faithful for certain special feasts. Fasting is refraining from food or drink to some degree. *The norms of fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59.* When fasting a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. Abstinence is refraining from eating meat. *The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon members of the Church from age 14 onwards.* There are exceptions given for health conditions, consult your parish priest for clarification on if you are exempt from fasting or abstinence.

- The days of fasting and abstinence in the USA are:
 - **Ash Wednesday and Good Friday** (days of fasting and abstinence)
 - **All Fridays during Lent** (days of abstinence)

Precept 5: "To help provide for the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability."

- "The fifth precept ("**You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church**") means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability." The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* clarifies that, "This means contributing to the support of the activities of the Church with time, talent, and financial

resources, each according to their ability.” This means that faithful work to ensure “that the Church has what is necessary for divine worship, for the works of the apostolate and of charity, and for the decent support of ministers” according to the *Code of Canon Law* § 222. There we see that a practicing Catholic is “also obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor from their own resources.” By social justice the Church means respect for the human person and embracing human solidarity.

“The five precepts of the Church are meant to guarantee for the faithful the indispensable minimum in the spirit of prayer, the sacramental life, moral commitment and growth in love of God and neighbor” (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

In addition to these precepts we see that a practicing Catholic is **called by their baptism to lead a life in keeping with the teaching of the gospel**, which would constitute obeying the **Ten Commandments**, being continually inspired and purified by the **Sermon on the Mount**, and striving to live out the **corporal and spiritual works of mercy** as the opportunities present themselves. The Church is the divinely instituted Teacher of the Gospel, **as such the faithful are obliged to believe all that the Church teaches regarding faith and morals**. The summary of the Church’s beliefs are contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. One can also read the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* and/or the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for a faithful presentation of what the Church teaches.

If a person is not obeying these precepts or striving to follow the Church’s moral teachings then the Church would consider them to be a non-practicing Catholic.

Note: For any person “incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.” This means that a non-practicing Catholic is still Catholic and only needs to embrace the call to conversion that God has given all people by going to the sacrament of Reconciliation to embrace the fruits of their Baptism and the joy of communion with the Church once more.

Ten Commandments:

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

The Beatitudes:

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
2. Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
4. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Sermon on the Mount: Matthew 5, 6, 7

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.’ (Matthew 22:36-40)

Corporal Works of Mercy:

1. Feed the hungry.
2. Give drink to the thirsty.
3. Clothe the naked.
4. Shelter the homeless.
5. Visit the sick.
6. Visit the imprisoned.
7. Bury the dead.

Spiritual Works of Mercy:

1. Counsel the doubtful.
2. Instruct the ignorant.
3. Admonish sinners.
4. Comfort the afflicted.
5. Forgive offenses.
6. Bear wrongs patiently.
7. Pray for the living and the dead