

Faith in Five – Adults Precepts of the Catholic Church



1. The Precepts of the Catholic Church outline the absolute minimum actions required of Catholics to be in full communion with the Church. The Church uses these precepts to 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 of moral living intentionally, this is a grave matter – a mortal sin. Each of these precepts of the Catholic Church is a requirement, an obligation.
2. The Precepts of the Church are derived from Catholicism’s moral and doctrinal foundations, and are reflected in many ways, perhaps most notably in her canon law and liturgical discipline. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 2031 says that **the moral life is spiritual worship**. The precepts of the Church concern the moral and Christian life united with the liturgy and nourished by it, with the celebration of the sacraments (CCC, 2048).
3. Since the beginning of the 4th century, the Church expected certain behaviors from its members: there was a responsibility to attend Mass on Sundays and special feasts, receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, and refrain from marriage during Advent and Lent. By the end of the Middle Ages, it was agreed that Catholics were obliged to perform certain practices. In 1555, Saint Peter Canisius, listed five precepts; thereafter, various sources outlined six precepts. In 1992, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* outlined five precepts. Regardless of their number, “the purpose of the precepts has always been to preserve good order in the Church, to maintain discipline within the Church, and to establish a specific Catholic identity” ([Source](#)).
4. The Precepts may be used as a “self-assessment”, measuring compliance with the Church to be considered a practicing Catholic. Non-Catholics may consult the list to see what would be expected of them as Catholics. We have the right to be instructed by the Church, and we also have the duty to observe what is taught by the legitimate authority of the Church (CCC, 2037). Knowing the faith is the first step in being Catholic; accepting and practicing the faith involves finding value in the wisdom of the rules and laws.
5. The Precepts of the Church describe the minimum effort we must make in prayer and in living a moral life for active Church membership. We are asked to put our belief into action and practice what we believe. All Catholics are called to move beyond the minimum by growing in love of God and love of neighbor.
6. The Precepts of the Church (CCC, 2041-2043) are as follows:
 - a. **Attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation** - requires the faithful to sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord 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.

- b. **Confession of serious sin 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.
 - c. **Reception of Holy Communion at least once a year 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.
 - d. **Observance of the days of fast and abstinence** - 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. Catholics are urged to abstain from meat on **all** Fridays, or make every Friday a day of self-denial and mortification in prayerful remembrance of the passion of Jesus Christ ([Source](#)).
 - e. **Providing for the needs of the Church** - the faithful are obliged to assist with and the duty of providing for the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.
7. Precepts of the Church deliver both the fundamentals of the faith and a Catholic culture ([Source](#)). To be a practicing Catholic, there must be assent to these rules: "Assent" does not necessarily mean that all the teachings are understood, nor does it mean there is no struggle with some teachings. Assent means there is acceptance of the Church's wisdom, and that steps are taken toward understanding them better through prayer and study.
8. **Go further!** The precepts of the Catholic Church are minimum levels of participation in the life of the Church. They are reasonably achievable and allow opportunities for us to do more for God and His Church!
9. **How can I go beyond the precepts?**
- a. Attend Mass at least one more time a week. Most Church parishes celebrate Mass every day of the year.
 - b. Go to confession at least once a month and find a regular confessor so he can give you better guidance.
 - c. Find a good spiritual director to give you sound guidance for growing in the spiritual life.
 - d. Receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at every Mass, if you meet the guidelines for reception (are free from mortal sin, etc.).
 - e. Make a habit of practicing penitential and charitable acts beyond those required by the precepts of the Catholic Church.
 - f. Contribute as much as possible to the material needs of the Church and the needy.
 - g. Get involved in your parish!

Since God does so much for me, what could I not do for him?

St. Emilie de Vialar

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