

What We Believe

The Beauty of the Catholic Faith

Marcellino D'Ambrosio

Andrew and Sarah Swafford

Workbook



Nihil obstat: Rev. Msgr. Joseph G. Prior, STD
Censor librorum
May 11, 2022

Imprimatur: + Most Reverend Nelson J. Pérez
Archbishop of Philadelphia
April 20, 2022

Copyright © 2022 Ascension Publishing Group, LLC. All rights reserved.

With the exception of short excerpts used in articles and critical reviews, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, printed or electronic, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Excerpts from the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for use in the United States of America © 1994 United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission. English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* © 1997 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops—Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages are from the Revised Standard Version—Second Catholic Edition © 2006 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The “Tre Fontane” Abbey; Rome, Italy; Fczarnowski. Edited for color/saturation. Used with permission.

Ascension
PO Box 1990
West Chester, PA 19380
1-800-376-0520
ascensionpress.com

Cover Design: Stella Ziegler
Cover Art: Monica Skrzypczak, Outpouring of Trust
Interior Design: Sarah Stueve

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-954881-47-1

CONTENTS

About <i>What We Believe: The Beauty of the Catholic Faith</i>	v
Introduction – A Way of Life	xiii

Part I Who We Are

Session One – The Catholic Faith: The Fullness of Christian Life	3
---	---

Part II Our Faith

Session Two – The Journey of Faith	17
Session Three – God the Father, Creation, and the Fall	25
Session Four – Jesus Christ Our Savior	33
Session Five – The Holy Spirit, the Breath of God	41
Session Six – The Church	53

Part III Our Life

Session Seven – The Sacramental Life	65
Session Eight – Union with God: The Life of Prayer	73
Session Nine – Fasting: Becoming Christlike	83
Session Ten – Almsgiving: Our Mission of Mercy	91
Responses to the Study Questions	101

Not for duplication



Agnus Dei by Monica Skrzypczak

About What We Believe: The Beauty of the Catholic Faith

This series is a ten-part study program for small groups of two or more people. Individuals can take part as well, but we encourage you to participate with at least one other person—like your spouse or a friend—to discuss, encourage, and even challenge each other as you grow in your faith together:

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

—Matthew 18:20

Here we will explain what the study includes, how it works, and how to get the most out of it.

Materials

The components of the *What We Believe* study include:

- This **workbook**, which contains session summaries, home reading assignments, engaging study questions, responses to the questions, and talk notes on the video presentations. (Each participant, study leader, and small group facilitator will need one workbook.)
- The **book** *What We Believe*, which provides a substantial overview of the Catholic Faith. (Each participant, study leader, and small group facilitator will need one book.)
- Ten 30-minute **video presentations**, filmed on location in Rome, which are presented by Dr. Marcellino D’Ambrosio, Dr. Andrew and Sarah Swafford, and other featured presenters. These video presentations provide comprehensive teaching and commentary on the Catholic Faith. (Each group will need one DVD set or online access to the videos.)

- The **What We Believe** chart, which provides a visual overview of the Catholic Faith. It arranges the content of the Faith into twelve color-coded categories and identifies the key themes and doctrines Catholics should know.

In addition, every participant, leader, and small group facilitator should have a Catholic Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. For this study, we recommend *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible*, an RSV-2CE Bible that incorporates the same color-coded *Bible Timeline*™ Learning System that is used in *The Great Adventure*™ Catholic Bible Study Program.

How the Study Works

Each session of this study includes four essential steps, which are designed to fit together and build upon each other. Following these steps in order will help you get the most out of each session.



Step One: Home Preparation

Each session begins with personal study at home. This involves first reading the session summary (under “Establish the Context”) and the assigned selections from Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the book *What We Believe*, and the *What We Believe* chart (under “Read the Story”). After doing the readings, answer the session questions (under “Take a Deeper Look”), which will help you understand what you have read.

NOTE: *There is no home preparation for Session One.*

We recommend that you allow at least 90 minutes to complete the readings and the questions for each session. We also suggest that you do the home preparation in several sittings during the week. This will help you create a habit of daily Bible reading and prayerful meditation.

Step Two: Small Group Discussion

The small group discussion is one of the most rewarding components of any study. The discussion gives you and the others in your group an opportunity to share your insights into the readings and questions. The goal is to help you obtain a richer understanding of the material and apply it to your lives.

Trained facilitators will guide the discussion and keep it on track. To learn how to facilitate a small group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com. Be sure to follow the “Ten Commandments of Small Group Discussion” on page xi.

Step Three: Video Presentation

Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio, Dr. Andrew and Sarah Swafford, and other featured presenters wrap up each session with a video presentation filmed in Rome, which helps you gain a deeper understanding of our Catholic Faith, with a special emphasis on ways to apply what you have learned. The talk notes in this workbook provide a detailed outline of the video presentations that you will find helpful for review and discussion.

Step Four: Review of Responses

The final step—reviewing the responses at the back of this workbook—can be done on your own before you begin the next session. The responses will help you read the Scripture passages for the next session in the proper context.

For the most effective study experience, complete these steps in the following order: (1) Read and answer the questions, (2) discuss them in your small group, (3) view the video presentation, and (4) review the responses. During the discussion, your small group facilitator may incorporate points found in the responses, but please avoid reading through the responses before the discussion. The richness that comes from individual insights can be lost when participants view the responses before the discussion.

For more information about how to plan and promote a Bible study and how to facilitate a small group discussion, visit ascensionpress.com or call 1-800-376-0520.

Session Outline

Each session in this workbook has four sections for you to complete at home (Step One: Home Preparation):

- **Establish the Context** briefly summarizes the session, and sidebars provide additional details about topics related to the assigned readings.
- **Read the Story** lists the readings for you to do at home.
- **Take a Deeper Look** asks probing questions based on the readings and supplemental passages from the Bible and the *Catechism* and provides space for your answers.
- **Application** invites you to pray about what you have learned and act on it.

You will discuss **Take a Deeper Look** and **Application** with your group when you meet (Step Two: Small Group Discussion).

Next come the detailed **Talk Notes**, which will be useful as you and your group watch the video (Step Three: Video Presentation).

Last are the **Responses to the Session Questions**, which you will find in the back of the workbook. These are suggested answers to the **Take a Deeper Look** questions and provide an excellent review of the session you just completed. We suggest you review them after your group meeting but before you begin the next session (Step Four: Review of Responses).

Reading Guide

The following chart shows the main readings and supplemental texts for each session. Readings can also be found in each session under the heading **Read the Story**.

Session	Scripture	Catechism Paragraph	What We Believe Book	What We Believe Chart
1. The Catholic Faith: The Fullness of Christian Life*	1 Corinthians 12:12–26 Matthew 28:18–20 2 Thessalonians 2:15	78	Introduction / Chapter 1 (Optional)	General Overview
2. The Journey of Faith	Hebrews 11:1–9 Genesis 12:1–4; 22:1–19 Luke 1:26–56 Matthew 1:18–25; 2:13–21 James 2:14–26	145–149, 1814–1815	Chapters 2–4	Divine Revelation
3. God the Father, Creation, and the Fall	Genesis 1–3	22, 397–401, 405, 1008	Chapters 5–6	God / Creation and the Fall
4. Jesus Christ Our Savior	John 1:1–5; 13:1 Colossians 1:15–23 Philippians 2:6–11	615–616, 632, 646, 654, 1067	Chapters 7–8	Jesus Christ
5. The Holy Spirit, the Breath of God	Acts 1–2 Jeremiah 31:31–34 Galatians 5:13–25 Romans 14:17–18 Ezekiel 37:11–14	728–729, 731–732	Chapter 9	The Holy Spirit
6. The Church	John 17:11–23 1 Corinthians 12:12–30 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12	77–78, 825, 838, 857, 1116, 1128	Chapter 10 / Reread Chapters 1–2	The Church
7. The Sacramental Life	John 9:6–7 1 Corinthians 11:27–32 Ephesians 5:21–33 Colossians 2:12–13 Romans 6:3–4	654, 1085, 1116, 1504	Chapters 11–12	The Liturgy / The Sacraments

*The readings for Session One can be done during or after the group meeting. There is no home preparation for Session One.

Session	Scripture	Catechism Paragraph	What We Believe Book	What We Believe Chart
8. Union with God: The Life of Prayer	1 Thessalonians 5:17 Psalm 34:1–6 Luke 2; 18:9–14 Philippians 4:8 Psalm 63	2559–2560, 2564	Chapters 13–14	Catholic Spirituality
9. Fasting: Becoming Christlike	Philippians 3:7–11 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 Matthew 4.1–11; 5:6; 6:16–18 Mark 9:14–29	538–540	Chapter 15	The Moral Life
10. Almsgiving: Our Mission of Mercy	Isaiah 58:3–12 Hosea 6:6 Luke 16:19–31 Matthew 25:31–46 John 15:1–17 Leviticus 19:16–18	2447–2448, 2462–2463	Chapter 16 / Conclusion	The Commandments

What to Do During Each Small Group Meeting

1. Welcome and Introduction (10 minutes)
2. Small Group Discussion (40 minutes)

Note to Study Leaders: There is a short, small group discussion for the first week. Use the additional time to divide participants into groups of eight to twelve people, ensure that everyone has the study materials, and explain how the study works. Each small group should be led by a trained facilitator.

3. Video Presentation (30 minutes)
4. Closing and Prayer (5 minutes)

Getting the Most Out of This Study

This study will give you a new understanding and appreciation for the entire Catholic Faith. The “head knowledge” you learn will help you grow in “heart knowledge” as you follow up on what you have learned. God will always remain a mystery in some ways, though, and that is part of the beauty of our Faith: We can never exhaust the treasures of our Faith, of Scripture, or of Tradition. Fortunately for us, our Faith is not a subject to master; it is a whole way of life and an encounter with God himself.

When you begin your home assignments each week, start with a prayer, and place yourself in God’s presence. You might take the words of David as your prayer: “Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul” (Psalm 143:8). As you work through the readings, adopt an attitude of listening and being open to what God wants you to learn. What do the words say? What do they mean? How do they apply to your life?

An Important Note About the Responses to the Study Questions

Responses to the study questions are provided in the back of this workbook. These responses do not exhaust the meaning that can be found in the readings. You and the others in your group will have unique and equally valuable insights.

While the responses do not give the “right” answers, they do have two important purposes:

- The first is to provide a review of each session, which will help establish a context for the readings and questions in the following session. The best time to read the responses is just before starting the next session.
- The second is to provide guidelines for the small group facilitators.

Participants should not review the responses for each session until after the session is completed. Although it might be tempting to look at these responses in advance, it is important to wait, for the following reasons:

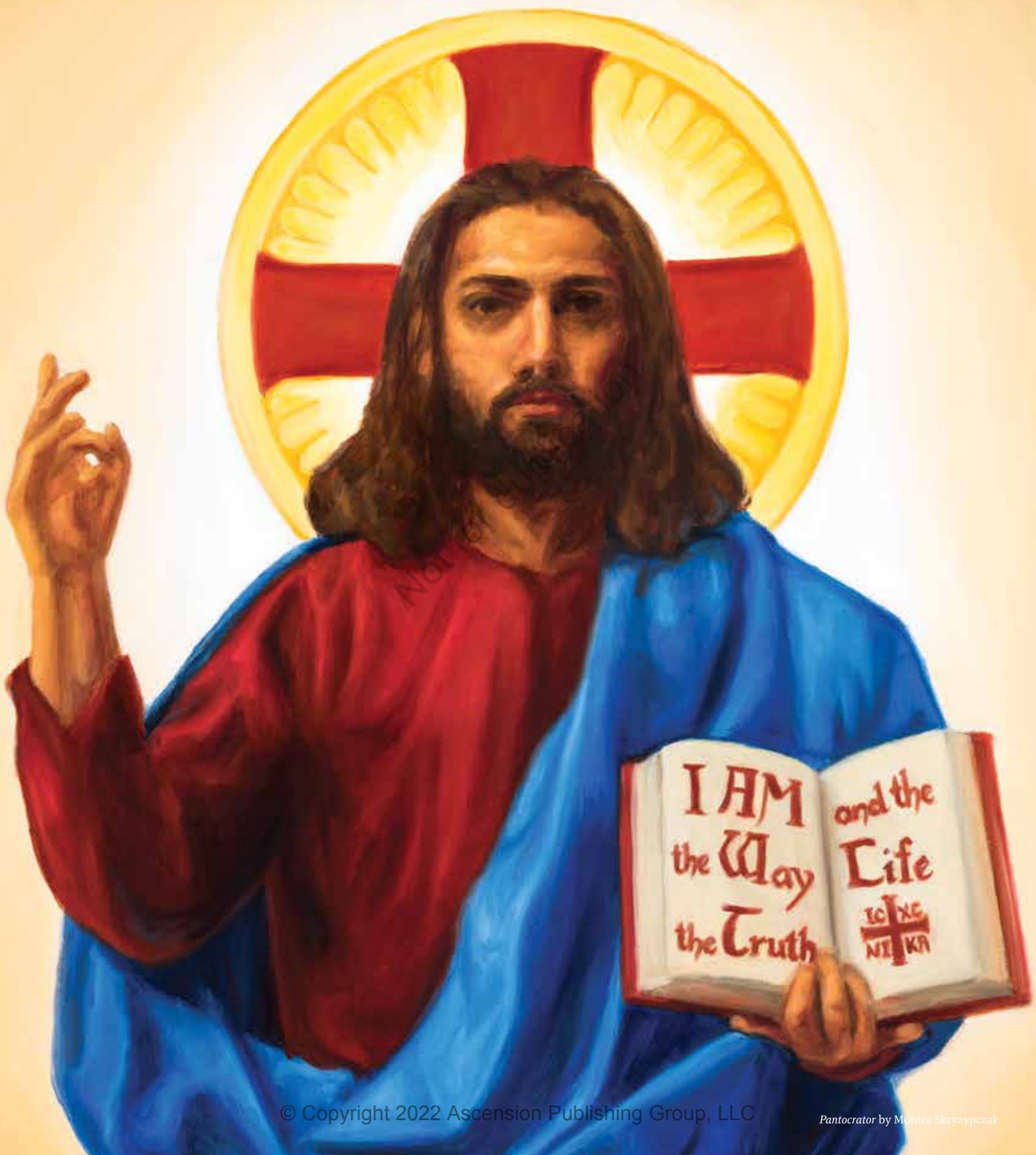
- This study is not about simply watching a video presentation and completing the readings. It is just as important to immerse yourself in the texts and engage them with your heart and mind. The study questions are designed to draw you into the readings so that they will be planted and grow in your heart. Another person’s response may satisfy your mind for a moment, but it will not nurture the growth that comes with doing the readings and answering the questions on your own.
- The success of any small group depends on a good discussion. A group of participants who have spent time pondering the readings on their own will have more varied insights to discuss.

For these reasons, please wait to read the responses until after you have met together. When you follow the steps of this study as described here, you will explore the Catholic Faith in different ways—in the readings, the small group discussions, the video presentations, the suggestions for living out what you are learning, and, finally, the responses. As you follow these steps over time, you will be more than fed; you will learn to feed yourself.

Ten Commandments of Small Group Discussion

- 1.** Enjoy yourself!
- 2.** Speak with respect and charity.
- 3.** Do not ridicule or dismiss what others say. Keep comments positive.
- 4.** Come prepared.
- 5.** If you were not able to prepare, let others speak first.
- 6.** Stick to the topic and questions at hand.
- 7.** Start and end on time.
- 8.** Allow silence. Give people a chance to think.
- 9.** Listen to others without interrupting.
- 10.** Keep personal matters within the group.

—Adapted from Thomas Smith's original "10 Commandments of a Small Group"



INTRODUCTION

A Way of Life

When people hear the word “Catholic,” the first thing that often pops into their minds is a church building, perhaps even the Vatican and St. Peter’s Square. Others think of important moral issues on which the Church takes a firm and generally unpopular position. For them and many others, both Catholic and non-Catholic alike, the Catholic Church is seen primarily as an institution. For many, Catholicism is simply a belief system with a strict moral code, led by a clerical hierarchy.

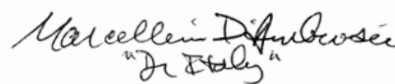
While beliefs, commandments, and hierarchy all figure into what “Catholic” is all about, the reality is far deeper—and more intriguing! We invite you to join us as we probe this mystery of the Church in a way that not only will answer questions you have always had but will also transform your life in very practical ways.

While this study does not attempt to give an exhaustive account of every aspect of the Catholic Faith, it does aim to get to the very heart of what the term “Catholic” actually means. Here, we will outline *who we are* as Catholic Christians, *what we believe*, and *how we live*. And we will do so while walking you through the highways and byways of a city that has been the Church’s geographical center since the first century. In the eternal city of Rome, the churches, ruins, and catacombs still resound with the echoes of the apostles, martyrs, and saints who have lived and died here over the past twenty centuries. As we follow in their footsteps together, we will learn from them what it means to follow Jesus, which is exactly what being Catholic is all about.

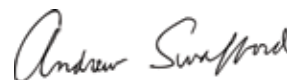
Jesus Christ is, of course, “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6); early Christians were known for being people of the journey, the people of the *Way* (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). This is important for us as we seek to retrieve our sense of Catholic Christianity as a dynamic *way of life*. For the Catholic Faith is not a mere philosophy or set of ideas, let alone another political interest group. Rather, being Catholic means making a pilgrimage journey into the heart of God in the company of a family that Jesus called the Church.

This is who we are as Catholic Christians, and the fullness of faith we profess is what was revealed to us by our Lord Jesus Christ: a faith and identity that animate a way of living—the Catholic way.

We invite you to join us and experience this pilgrimage study, which will open up for you “the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8).



Dr. Marcellino D’Ambrosio (Dr. Italy)



Dr. Andrew Swafford



Sarah Swafford

Not for duplication

PART I

Who We Are



*And Jesus came and said to them,
“All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me. Go therefore and
make disciples of all nations, baptizing
them in the name of the Father and
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have
commanded you; and behold, I am with
you always, to the close of the age.”*

MATTHEW 28:18–20





The Finding in the Temple by Monica Skrzyzpczak

SESSION ONE

The Catholic Faith: The Fullness of Christian Life

A. Establish the Context

In recent years, there has been a rediscovery of the Catholic Church as a band of disciples committed to following Jesus and bringing the basic gospel message, the *kerygma*, to the world. Many non-Catholic Christians are also enthusiastic about this idea.

At the same time, there has been a surge of interest in recovering our distinctive **Catholic identity**. This always includes an interest in and even a yearning for tradition.

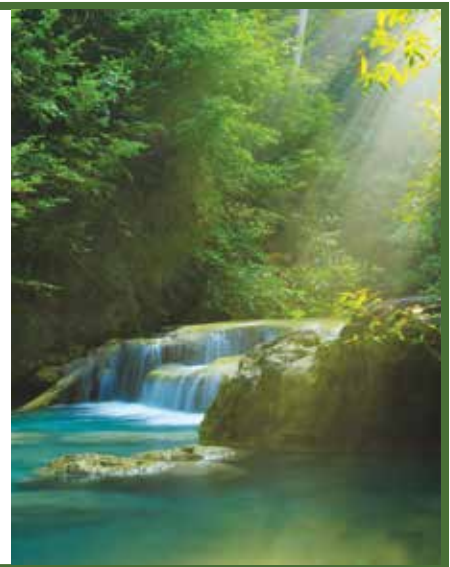
One of the many ways in which Catholic discipleship is distinct is that we follow Jesus not as isolated individuals but as a family, a holy nation—indeed as one body in Christ. In other words, we walk the way of discipleship together and are rooted in a communion that stretches back in a continuous line to the apostles, encompassing not only the community of wayfarers on the earth today but also the community of the triumphant saints in heaven. To be a Catholic Christian is to have a sense of belonging not only to Christ our head but to his body—the Church. Despite the failings and even scandals of some of its members on earth, this Church is already the spotless bride in the glorified saints in heaven. Who are we as Catholics? We are followers of Christ and, therefore, men and women of the Church.

This Church has been described as “catholic” for two thousand years. This word, coming from the Greek word for “all, whole, or full,” means that the Church, which possesses *all* the means of grace, is entrusted to bring the *whole* truth to the *whole* world. The Catholic Faith is not something different from Christianity. It is simply Christianity with nothing left out.

This fullness of Christ, entrusted to his Church, could only be passed on from generation to generation through inspired Scripture and its inseparable counterpart: Sacred Tradition. For Tradition passes on more than can ever be communicated through writing alone—even the inspired writings of Scripture.

The Riches of Sacred Scripture

St. Ambrose writes, “The Divine Scripture is a sea, containing in it deep meanings, and an abyss of prophetic mysteries; and into this sea enter many rivers. There are sweet and transparent streams, cool fountains too there are, springing up into life eternal, and pleasant words as a honey-comb. Agreeable sentences too there are, refreshing the minds of the hearers, if I may say so, with spiritual drink, and soothing them with the sweetness of their moral precepts. Various then are the streams of the sacred Scriptures. There is in them a first draught for you, a second, and a last.”¹



So to be a Catholic Christian is to be a member of Christ's body—the Church—which is commissioned to bring the fullness of life and truth to the whole world. That Church is sustained and preserved by not only the written Word of God but also by the living Tradition that anchors us to Christ and the apostles.

B. Read the Story

There is no home preparation for Session One. The following texts from Scripture and Tradition may be read together when your small group meets for the first time.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12–26; Matthew 28:18–20; 2 Thessalonians 2:15

Catechism: Paragraph 78

What We Believe book: Introduction, Chapter 1. (This reading is optional for Session One, but we recommend that participants read it after the session when they have time.)

What We Believe chart: General Overview (see question 4 below)

Why the Church Is Called “Catholic”

In his *Jerusalem Catecheses*, St. Cyril of Jerusalem instructs new Christians who are about to be baptized into the Catholic Church around the year AD 350. In this excerpt, he explains the range of meanings of the term *Catholic*. Coming from the Greek word for “all, whole, or full,” *Catholic* designates that Church that professes the *fullness* of the Faith and possesses the *fullness* of the means of grace. This Church is bound to offer this rich inheritance to *all* people across the *whole* world:

The Church is called Catholic or universal because it has spread throughout the entire world, from one end of the earth to the other. Again, it is called Catholic because it teaches fully and unfailingly all the doctrines which ought to be brought to men's knowledge, whether concerned with visible or invisible things, with the realities of heaven or the things of earth. Another reason for the name Catholic is that the Church brings under religious obedience all classes of men, rulers and subjects, learned and unlettered. Finally, it deserves the title Catholic because it heals and cures unrestrictedly every type of sin that can be committed in soul or in body, and because it possesses within itself every kind of virtue that can be named, whether exercised in actions or in words or in some kind of spiritual charism.²

C. Take a Deeper Look

Discuss what you seek to gain from this new study at this moment when Western culture increasingly sees the Catholic Church and the Catholic Faith as irrelevant and outdated.

1. The reading from 1 Corinthians 12 is one of the classic texts in which Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ.

- a. *What conclusions does St. Paul draw from the fact that we are one body in Christ?*

- b. *Can you think of any other implications of this doctrine that the Church is in fact Christ's own body?*

2. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is a favorite text of many evangelical brothers and sisters. The word "catholic" comes from the Greek term meaning "all, whole, or full." How does this text express the various ways the Church and its mission are "catholic"? (See also the sidebar "Why the Church Is Called Catholic.")

3. In the readings from 2 Thessalonians and the *Catechism*, we glimpse Tradition as a whole life that is handed on from person to person, generation to generation. It is passed on in the inspired writings of Sacred Scripture, but, since it contains more than can be captured in writing, it is passed on in a number of other ways as well.

- a. *In your own experience, what things cannot simply be learned through reading and writing?*

- b. *In what various ways does the Church pass on its Tradition besides writings like Sacred Scripture and the Catechism?*

4. Familiarize yourself with the *What We Believe* chart. It will be a useful reference throughout this study. The chart organizes the major beliefs and practices of the Faith into twelve color-coded categories. Notice, too, the *Catechism* numbers and the section titled Key Doctrines. Why are these doctrines important? What do they mean to you? If you are unfamiliar with them, where can you go to learn more about them?

Responses to the questions for this session can be found on pages 101–103.

D. Application

Reflect

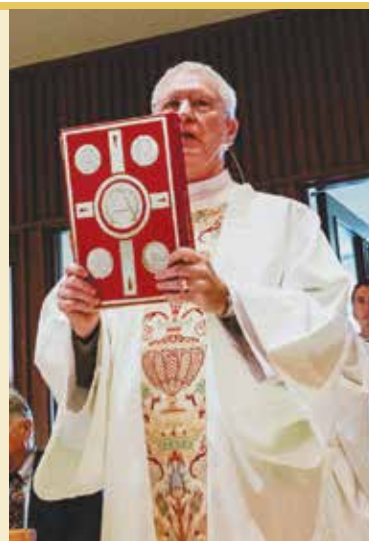
One of the primary images of the Church in the New Testament and in Catholic Tradition is the Church as the universal family of God to which all people are called and in which all are welcome. Many pagans were struck by the affection and loyalty of Christians for one another, noticeable even when the Christians were being put to death publicly in the arena. A second-century Church Father quotes the non-Christians as remarking, “See how they love one another.”³

Pagans did not find this committed community of the Church to be “cliquey.” Despite the threat of persecution, the Christians did not form a closed and exclusive community. Abandoned children, abused women, foreigners, slaves, and those stricken by plague found in the Church a refuge and a port in the storm of life. Many, therefore, made the Church their new family and learned to call God their Father.

Do the unchurched today look at our parishes, our study groups, and our families and say, “See how they love one another?” Are they attracted by our mutual affection? Do they feel welcome?

Reverencing Scripture

“The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord.”⁴ Because of this, Sacred Scripture is revered not only in our hearts and minds but in the Liturgy itself, as when the priest or deacon elevates the Book of the Gospels and when the faithful trace the Sign of the Cross over their foreheads, lips, and hearts before the Gospel reading, signifying their desire that the Word of God remain in their minds, on their lips, and in their hearts.



Commit

Look for new and very practical ways to make our families, our small groups, our apostolates, and our parishes look and feel more like the universal family of God that we are in our deepest identity.

Pray

The most important prayer of all, the Lord's Prayer, contains in itself the notion of the Church as family. Jesus teaches us to address God not as Master or King of the Universe, though he is both of those things and more. He teaches us to address him as Father. And the classic form of this prayer, given to us by St. Matthew, does not have us address him as "my Father." Rather we call upon him together as "our Father," identifying ourselves as brothers and sisters—as family.

Let us conclude our first study session by standing and praying together slowly and thoughtfully this precious family prayer.

The Basilica of San Clemente

The Basilica of San Clemente, dedicated to St. Clement I, the fourth bishop of Rome (AD 88–99) and third successor to St. Peter, is the site of one of Rome's oldest places of Christian worship. Its very existence tells the story of the persecuted first-century Church and its eventual triumph over the Roman Empire. Entering the basilica, visitors can descend beneath the present church to view the previous basilica and, beneath that, an earlier building that was probably used for Christian worship.



Interior of the Basilica of San Clemente

The first structure on the site was destroyed by the Great Fire of Rome, which engulfed the city in AD 64. Possibly set by Nero himself, the fire was blamed on Christians; Nero used it as a pretext to instigate the first organized persecution of Christians. Later, a new structure was built over the ruins, which tradition tells us was acquired by the Roman senator Titus Flavius Clemens, a second-century convert to Christianity, who allowed the building to be used as a place for Christians to meet and worship in secret.

Curiously, in the early third century, a small temple dedicated to the Roman god Mithras was built in the courtyard of an adjoining apartment building. Popular among Roman soldiers, the cult of Mithras was an early rival of Christianity, and visitors to San Clemente can still view this small sanctuary.

Following the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century, both buildings were filled in with rubble, and a Christian basilica dedicated to St. Clement was built above them. This basilica was the site of two local Church councils and a papal election, and its walls are covered with a rich collection of early medieval paintings.

In the twelfth century, the present basilica was built above the earlier one. It features a beautiful mosaic apse depicting the Crucifixion. The vines in the mosaic represent the Church, which blooms from the cross of Christ. Saints from the church in Rome, such as Peter, Paul, Clement, and Lawrence, are represented on the basilica walls, and the tombs of Saints Cyril and Methodius, apostles to the Slavic nations, are located in a side chapel.

Churches and Shrines: The Early Church's Historical Dimension

The Christian Faith has an intrinsically *historical* dimension. This is because of the Incarnation, which took place in history and in places that we can visit to this very day. For example, the early churches of Rome mark the apostolic beginnings of the Catholic Church—places where apostles and other early Christian saints worshipped and died. Parts of the study videos were filmed in these churches.

During the first four centuries of Christianity, when Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire, the Christians in Rome worshiped in house churches. The “titular” churches in Rome generally originated in these primitive house churches: “Each meeting place took its name, or title (*titulus*), from the property owner.”⁵ By the end of the third century, there were about twenty-five such sites in Rome. After Constantine’s legalization of the Faith, many of these churches were enlarged or replaced by larger and more permanent structures but retained their original names.⁶ These ancient churches connect us to the first Christians in Rome. And the Eucharistic Liturgy that we celebrate in them today echoes the Eucharists celebrated in the same places by the first Christians in Rome nearly two thousand years ago.

Scripture: The Inspired Word of God

The Bible is a collection of seventy-three books written by many different authors over more than fifteen hundred years. The forty-six books of the Old Testament tell the story of salvation history before the coming of Christ, and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament tell us about Christ and the early Church.

Because the Holy Spirit inspired and guided the human authors to write precisely what God intended, God is the ultimate author of Sacred Scripture. This does not mean that he dictated the Scriptures to the human authors. Rather, he used their skills, talents, and knowledge to convey in human language the truths needed for our salvation.

Since God is Truth, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, Sacred Scripture—as his Word—is *inerrant*, or without error. This does not mean, however, that individuals will never misunderstand it. It does mean that Scripture must be interpreted in accordance with the living Tradition of the Church—the guardian and custodian of the Bible.

As the eternal Word of God, Christ is the fullness of truth—that is, God has revealed in him all we need for salvation, and, after Christ, there will be no further revelation. The role of the Church is to preserve the revelation that Christ entrusted to her and faithfully hand it on to each generation.

Dead Sea Scroll Facsimile, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem



SESSION ONE TALK NOTES

The Catholic Faith: The Fullness of Christian Life

I. Pilgrimage as a Life-Changing Experience

II. The Church as Family of God

- a. The historical continuity of Catholicism
- b. Understanding who we are, what we believe, and how to live our faith

III. The Church: The Story of a Family

- a. A relationship, not an ideology
- b. The Church as the household of God
- c. The familial language of the Church

IV. The People of God

- a. The martyrdom of St. Peter
- b. Liturgical feasts as “national” holidays of the Church
- c. Church leadership
- d. The Church as the body of Christ
 - i. Every member is indispensable
 - ii. Made alive through the gift of the Holy Spirit
- e. Christ’s victory over sin, death, and the false gods of the world

V. The Fullness of Christian Life

- a. Catholic means universal and fullness

- b. *Kata holos*: “according to the whole”
- c. Fullness of life and truth
- d. “Catholic” is a quality of the Church—leaving no one out and no truth out

VI. Sacred Scripture and Tradition

- a. Tradition is everything the Church believes and does
- b. A life-giving continuity from Jesus, through his apostles and the Church
- c. *Paradosis, paradidomi*: handing over
- d. More “caught” than “taught”
- e. Scripture is part of Tradition
 - i. The canon of the Bible comes from Tradition
 - ii. The term “New Testament” referred to the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ before it referred to the Bible.
 - iii. Liturgy is the proper habitat of Scripture
- f. The Liturgy immerses us in Tradition

VII. Gifts and Gratitude

- a. Serving with the Missionaries of Charity
- b. The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist
- c. Remembering the Lord’s gifts
- d. The Litany of Gratitude