Common Catholic Questions & Answer

Who founded the Catholic Church?
Jesus founded the Catholic Church. The New Testament shows that Christ deliberately created a community of disciples to carry on his mission in the world. This community is the Catholic Church, which has existed since the time of Christ and the Apostles.

What is the source of the Church's authority?
Christ himself is the source of the Church's authority. Christ founded the Church, created its structure, placed Peter at the head, gave it his own authority, identified it with himself, promised to be with it forever, and sent his Spirit (the Holy Spirit) to guide it.

What do Catholics mean by "Tradition"?
Catholics refer to something called Tradition. What is it? Where does it come from? And why would anyone care about anything except the Bible, anyway?

Are the Pope and the Church really "Infallible"?
The concept of infallibility is one of the most common Catholic questions. It's widely misunderstood. But this topic, properly understood, is an important part of a strong faith in the Risen Lord!

Shouldn't I just follow my conscience?
Understanding conscience is essential to the moral life. Strengthen your faith with solid Catholic teaching on moral conscience.

When was the Bible written?
The Holy Bible contains many individual books, and was written over a period of about twelve or thirteen centuries. All of the New Testament books, though, were written during a short period of time.

What's different about the Catholic Bible?
The Catholic Bible has been the same for nearly 2,000 years. We use the same set of Old Testament books as Jesus and the Apostles used. But Protestant reformers rejected some of those original books in the 1500s, creating a Protestant Bible.

What is Purgatory?
Purgatory is the state of those who die in God’s friendship, assured of their eternal salvation, but still have the need for purification to enter into the happiness of heaven.

What does it mean to genuflect and why do Catholics do it?
To genuflect, in Latin means “bending of the knee.” Catholics genuflect, kneel briefly on one knee, before entering a church pew as a sign of adoration and greeting directed toward the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, we kneel on both knees and bow from the waist. It was also symbolic of our smallness and humility in the presence of the greatness of our Lord.
**Why do Catholics dip their fingers in the holy water and then cross themselves when they enter church?**

The holy water is a reminder of our baptism and a Christian’s new life in Christ. We make the sign of the cross with holy water as a blessing for ourselves before we approach the presence of God.

**What is an indulgence?**

An indulgence is a simple prayer for those in purgatory (the process of purification) or for ourselves. It gives partial remission of temporal punishment that may still be due for sin committed, but already forgiven. Indulgences have changed through the years. Now, the Church says, any good deed or prayer has the same effect as the old indulgences. But since no one can know how fervent the prayer was or how difficult the good deed, there is no longer any point in specifying by “days” how much is accomplished in the spiritual world by our actions here in the physical world.

**What is the action of the people right before the Gospel is read at Mass?**

They cross themselves on the forehead, the lips, and the heart, meaning Jesus is present in their minds, their words, and their hearts.

**What is Holy Water?**

It is water that has been blessed by a special ritual including exorcisms and blessed salts.

**What is a novena?**

This is the recitation of prayers and the practicing of devotions on nine days, usually to seek some special favor. Novenas are made in preparation for a great feast, but we also make them in thanksgiving and petition.

**Why do some people strike their breast during the Eucharistic Prayer?**

It is a sign of sorrow for sin, the root of which is thought to be in the heart. It was used as an expression of guilt by witnesses to Jesus’ crucifixion (Luke 23:48).

**Why do Catholics light votive candles?**

Votive comes from a Latin word, meaning vow or promise. We often light votives for the dead, seeking a favor for that person in return for some promise on our part. Our prayer for that person actually has more meaning than the lighting of the candle.

**What is the Sign of the Cross and why / how do you make it?**

It is a sign of blessing and obtaining God’s protection. It is a visible profession of our belief in the Trinity. While making the Sign of the Cross, the words “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” are usually said. The large Sign of the Cross is made by touching the forehead, then mid-body (or chest), then the left shoulder, and finally the right shoulder with the right hand. The small Sign of the Cross is made with the thumb of the right hand from top to bottom, then left to right.

**What are Holy Days?**

In the Middles Ages it was common to honor saints with holy days of obligation (obligation to attend Mass on those days). In the US the holy days are All Saints (Nov.1)
Christmas (Dec. 25), the Solemnity of Mary (Jan 1) Ascension Thursday (40 days after Easter), The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (Aug. 15), and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8).

**What are Vespers?**
It is an evening prayer service with scripture, song, and prayers. It is a part of the Liturgy of the Hours, which is prayed daily by clergy and religious.

**What is intercessory prayer?**
This type of prayer simply means prayer for the needs of others.

**What does INRI mean?**
Usually found above the crucified Jesus, these are the first letters of the Latin title written by Pilate, meaning “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”.

**What is ICHTHUS?**
This comes from the Greek word for fish. The five Greek letters stand for Jesus Christ, God’s son Savior.

**Why do Catholics kneel, sit and stand at different times?**
We kneel out of reverence and to humble ourselves in the presence of God. Standing was the ordinary position at worship for almost 1000 years of Christianity. We stand at the Gospel of out of respect for the Word of God. Sitting is the posture of receptive listening. It became popular for the listening parts of the Mass only after pews were introduced into churches in the 16th century.

**What is a sacrament?**
A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace”. A sacrament is the coming together of God and people, the divine and human, in a saving experience. The seven sacraments of the Church are: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage, and Holy Orders.

**What is a sacramental?**
Sacraments are holy objects or actions that promote devotion in the worship of God in our daily life. They include religious signs, symbols, devotions, prayers, gestures, rituals, music, images and natural or made objects. We should make use of sacramentals with faith and devotion, and never make them objects of superstition.

**Why go to confession to a priest? Why can’t you just pray to God about your sins, and ask forgiveness?**
We go to a priest as the representative of the community. When we sin, it usually involves other people, so the priest represents the community, these other people. Only by going to a priest, are we able to receive the sacramental grace of reconciliation.

**Why are we sprinkled with holy water?**
It is a form of blessing. It is a reminder of our baptism and symbolizes making us clean.

**Why do we have a crucifix instead of a plain cross?**
A crucifix has an image of Christ’s body on it. Emphasis on the suffering Savior led to the popularity of the crucifix.
Why do we have so many statues in Church?
The statues of saints are a reminder to us that ordinary people like ourselves can triumph over the adversity around us. We can overcome our failings and grow closer to God as the saints have done.

Why do we fast?
Fasting is a way of showing devotion to God through sacrifice. In doing so, we can better focus our attention away from earthly needs and toward a deeper relationship with God.

What is the Rosary and Why do we pray it?
A rosary is a set of 150 Hail Marys and 15 Our Fathers accompanied by meditations on the life, passion and glory of Christ. Ordinarily only one third of the rosary is prayed at any one time. The beads are just a system of counting the prayers. We pray the rosary as a way to enter into the life of Christ and become closer to Him.

Why is Mary so important in the Catholic Church?
Mary is important because she is the mother of Jesus and because she was chosen by God to be Christ’s mother.

What is the Way of the Cross or the Stations of the Cross?
It is a pilgrimage in which we visit in our minds the most important scenes of our Lord’s Passion. Catholic Churches have 14 stations displayed and during special devotions and meditations are done with these, especially during Lent.

What is incense and why is it used in the Church?
Incense is a substance that when burned gives off a fragrant aroma. Incense is used to purify, bless and to symbolize the motion of our prayers rising toward God.