



Catholicism 101 Content Overview

The following document outlines the concepts of the Catholic faith and the highlighted vocabulary words from each module of Catholicism 101.

Module 1: Welcome

- The word *catholic* means “universal and worldwide.”
- Catholics around the world are united by the same core beliefs and traditions.
- Jesus’ disciples continue his worldwide mission.
- The Catholic Church joins other Christian denominations striving to follow Jesus’ call to love and serve.

Vocabulary words and concepts: catholic, Christian, mission, Jesus Christ, disciples

Module 2: Revelation

- God’s Revelation comes to humanity in two ways: in natural revelation and in Divine Revelation.
- *Revelation* is the self-communication by God that allows God to become known by human beings.
- The way God is most fully made known to humanity is through the person of Jesus Christ. Catholics, like all Christians, believe Jesus is the Son of God, the fullness of God’s Revelation. Catholics describe this as the Incarnation of God, or “God in the flesh.”
- After his earthly ministry, Jesus entrusted the Apostles to pass on the Gospel message he handed over to them. God ensured that all generations would be able to come to know Jesus through the gifts of Tradition and Scripture.
- At first, Tradition was passed on by word of mouth. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, believers began to preserve the stories by writing them down. Eventually they were collected to make up the Bible or Sacred Scripture.
- As God’s Son on Earth, Jesus embodied all that is good in humanity. He invited people to follow and imitate him in order to be truly happy.

Vocabulary words and concepts: mystery, natural revelation, Divine Revelation, God, Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, image and likeness, faith, Son of God, Incarnation, Apostles, ministry, Gospel, Holy Spirit, inspired, Bible, Christ, radical commitment to love, moral guidance

Module 3: The Bible

- Catholics look to the Bible—also called Sacred Scripture—as stories about God’s relationship with the human family. They are encountered during every Mass and when read for private prayer and study.
- The 73 books of the Bible, together, tell the great story of God’s relationship with the human family through the lens of faith.
 - Different types of literature are used in the collection of books in the Bible.
 - The Bible was written by humans whose knowledge was limited in comparison to what we know today.
 - The Bible was written over a long span of time, during which beliefs grew and evolved.
- This long, amazing story of the Bible along with Sacred Tradition is what Catholics call salvation history.
- The Bible is structured by two main sections:
 - The first section is the Old Testament. This collection of writings originated with the Jewish people. These texts were written between 1000 and 100 BC. Here you can find the historical accounts of the Israelites, laws, poems, prayers, and teachings on the meaning of life.
 - The second main section of the Bible is called the New Testament. It was written by Christians in the first and early second centuries after the death of Jesus.
 - a. The first four books are called Gospels, meaning “good news.” Christians look to the Gospels as the main source of information about the life and teachings of Jesus.
 - b. The New Testament continues with the book called the Acts of the Apostles, describing how Christianity began to spread after Jesus’ Ascension into Heaven.
 - c. What follows, in the New Testament, is a group of letters or epistles written by Saint Paul and others giving believers warnings, advice, and encouragement.
 - d. The last book in the Bible is called the Book of Revelation. It was written to offer hope to the early Christian churches that were suffering persecution.
- Believers turn to the Bible as the Word of God. These writings are meant to be shared and studied to inspire, provide guidance, unite humanity, and bring people closer to God.

Vocabulary words and concepts: Bible, Sacred Scripture, faith, salvation history, Word of God, Old Testament, New Testament, biblical citation, Israelites, covenant, Ten Commandments, Promised Land, Abraham, Moses, Gospels, Resurrection, mystery, Acts of the Apostles, Ascension, Heaven, epistles, Book of Revelation

Module 4: Jesus Christ

- God, in Jesus, became a human being when he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit to his mother, Mary. Through a precious infant, all of humanity is invited into friendship and greater intimacy with God.
- Christians believe Jesus is both fully human and fully divine, bringing humanity closer to God.
- The life of Jesus is presented: his childhood, his public ministry, leading to his Passion, death on a cross, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven.
- Following his Ascension into Heaven, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon his followers to lead and guide them. They continued to preach and teach in his name, and they gathered once a week to share in the Eucharist, a special meal in remembrance of him.
- Jesus' disciples of today continue to gather as a church community to be nourished by him and his teachings.

Vocabulary words and concepts: Jesus Christ, Old Testament, New Testament, Incarnation, Holy Spirit, Mary, Emmanuel, Jewish, Jesus' public ministry, Kingdom of God, Apostles, "Our Father," Jesus' teachings and instructions, crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Heaven, Church, servant leader

Module 5: The Trinity

- A creed is a statement of a person's beliefs or beliefs that are held in common within a community. Creedal statements unify members of the worldwide Catholic Church.
- Written in AD 325, the Nicene Creed begins with the words, "I believe in one God." The belief in one God is called monotheism. This belief in one God is rooted in the faith of the Jewish people. Unlike many of their neighboring nations who believed in many gods, the Jewish people held that there was only one true God.
- The central mystery of the Christian faith is the belief in the Trinity—that there is one God in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—three unique individuals who are completely unified at the same time. When God acts, all three Persons are united in that action. There is no separation.
- Catholics describe the Trinity and other profound beliefs as mysteries. These mysteries are not like a mystery in a book, where you just need to keep reading to figure it out. Religious mysteries will always be beyond our human capabilities to understand.
- When Catholics pray, they begin and end with the Sign of the Cross. Making the Sign of the Cross is a beautiful, visual way Catholics profess their faith in the Trinity with mind, body, and heart. This ancient gesture also unites Catholics all over the world.
- Catholics also believe humans are created in the image and likeness of the Trinity. As the Trinity is united through love, so too can people be united by the amazing spiritual power of love.

Vocabulary words and concepts: creed, Sunday, monotheism, Jewish, Nicene Creed, Trinity, mysteries, Saint Augustine, Saint Patrick, Sign of the Cross, love, just, analogies, incarnate, solidarity, protecting life, offering love and support, sharing responsibilities, uniting as one, valuing unique perspectives, acting in solidarity with those in need

Module 6: The Paschal Mystery

- The cycle of death and life in the natural world reflects one of the greatest Christian beliefs called the Paschal Mystery, referring to Jesus Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven.
- Jesus overcame sin and death to enable human beings to join the Trinity in Heaven.
- Death is not the final end of life, because of Jesus' victory over death. Jesus offers hope after death for eternal life.
- The Bible begins with stories about how God created all human beings to live in peace, harmony, and unity with each other and with God. Then humans disturbed this unity by starting down the wrong path of sin and selfishness. Adam and Eve, who represent humanity's first ancestors, were given a life in complete union with God, but they sinned by choosing to disobey God.
- Believers refer to this selfish event as Original Sin separating Adam and Eve from each other and from God. The Son of God was sent to heal this separation in the person of Jesus. Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus was completely faithful and selfless.
- Jesus was given a trial, tortured, and condemned to death by crucifixion. Believers call these events Jesus' Passion.
- Jesus suffered death on a cross. On the third day after Jesus' death, he was risen from the dead. Jesus' Resurrection made his body alive again, but in a new and mysterious way. The resurrected Christ spent forty more days teaching and preaching.
- On the final day, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to continue to guide his disciples. He then, both body and soul, ascended into Heaven.
- The Paschal Mystery is unfolding in everyday life. The living, dying, and rising of Jesus takes on new meaning in the struggles, losses, sacrifices, joys, and hope his disciples experience today.

Vocabulary words and concepts: disciples, new life, Paschal Mystery, Jesus Christ's Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, Trinity, eternal life, Bible, Adam and Eve, Original Sin, Son of God, Peter, Apostles, soul, Christ, Holy Spirit, Kingdom of God

Module 7: Loving Our Neighbor

- Living as a disciple of Christ encompasses every aspect of life.
- Jesus said the two most important laws were (1) to love God and (2) to love our neighbor. Love involves selfless actions, such as when we place the needs of others before our own desires.
- Jesus taught love of neighbor includes all our neighbors—those near and far.
- The Bible emphasizes that because all human beings are created in God’s image, every person has dignity and deserves respect. From the moment a person is conceived in their mother’s womb until the person’s last breath, all human life is sacred and needs to be protected and nurtured.
- Much of Jesus’ ministry focused on serving people in need. He taught, “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (John 13:34). Catholics, like all Christians, are called to follow Jesus’ example by serving the most vulnerable and most in need.
- Disciples of Jesus believe they are not alone in this work. Christians go forth together to serve their neighbors in faith. They know that the Trinity will provide the spiritual gifts needed to spread love in the world.
- Social injustices in the world include poverty, abortion, violence, racism, abuse, neglect, hunger, pollution, and many other threats to human dignity. Christians are called by Jesus’ commandment to love neighbors by working together to create social justice.
- The Catholic Church has developed a strong tradition for justice called Catholic Social Teaching.
- The Seven Principles of Catholic Social Teaching help us to become more aware of how people can love their neighbors by working together to make a difference:
 - Respect the life and dignity of every person
 - Ensure the right and duty to participate in society
 - Act responsibly to protect fundamental human rights
 - Put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first
 - Protect the dignity of work and the rights of workers
 - Build solidarity across divisions and create peace
 - Care for the Earth
- There are two main goals in working for social justice:
 - Help people who are suffering from an injustice.
 - Fix the root causes that create the injustice.

Vocabulary words and concepts: Gospel, neighbors, Sunday, Bible, dignity, sacred, Trinity, disciples, spiritual gifts, social injustices, abortion, racism, human dignity, social justice, Catholic Social Teaching, root causes

Module 8: Original Sin, Morality and Grace

- The Bible begins with two ancient stories about God creating everything so that humans could live in perfect harmony with creation, with one another, and with God.
- This harmony unravels when human beings betray God by intentionally doing what God warned them not to do. This third story has come to be known as the Fall. It recalls the first case of humanity's disobedience to God. Catholics call this Original Sin.
- This first instance of sin weakened the human power to relate to God and to do good. But the Bible reminds believers that all humanity is created in God's image, so humans are still good. And yet, because all humans are born into the state of Original Sin, it is more difficult to resist the attraction of temptation that leads us to say and do hurtful things.
- Morality is the system Catholics use to decide between good and evil. Free will is the God-given gift that allows people to choose from different options. Because we have free will we are able to make our own willful choices.
- Catholics believe that to make good decisions, God has given humans the ability to recognize what is good and what is sinful. Our conscience is like an inner voice that guides us toward the right thing to say and do.
- Because of Original Sin, our conscience is not perfect. It needs to be practiced and developed. Virtues are what help us to practice doing good.
- Catholics rely on the Catholic Church's teachings for guidance in moral decision making. Catholics also believe in God's special help called grace.
- Catholics believe God's grace can come through everyday people who are open to God's will.
- The Bible tells the story of God's grace. Despite the sins of humanity, God gave the world laws to guide people back toward living in accordance with God's will. God also sent the gift of many prophets, who pointed the way when people missed the mark. Ultimately God sent the supreme grace, God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Vocabulary words and concepts: intentionality, Original Sin, sin, temptation, free will, sinful, conscience, virtues, salvation history, grace, priest, Bible, prophets, Jesus Christ, bishop, love

Module 9: Prayer

- One way Catholics strengthen their friendship with God is by spending time with God in prayer.
- When believers ask God for help, these prayers are called petitions.
- Prayer is also a way to give thanks to God, to ask God questions, to spend time listening to God in silence, or to read the Bible.
- There are many ways Catholics pray to connect with and grow closer to God. Just as each person is unique, there are many different ways to communicate with God.
- The goal of prayer isn't to change God's mind, but for God to change the hearts and minds of believers.
- Catholics are known for some of their unique forms of prayer, called traditional prayer. Some traditional prayers are the Rosary, novenas, the "Our Father," and the Stations of the Cross.

Vocabulary words and concepts: creed, Sunday, monotheism, Jewish, Nicene Creed, Trinity, mysteries, Saint Augustine, Saint Patrick, Sign of the Cross, love, just, analogies, incarnate, solidarity, protecting life, offering love and support, sharing responsibilities, uniting as one, valuing unique perspectives, acting in solidarity with those in need

Module 10: Sacraments and Liturgy

- A spiritual reality is something that actually exists but has no physical presence. Symbolic objects or actions point us to this reality beyond our senses to consider the deeper mystery.
- The Catholic Church uses signs, symbols, and symbolic actions to make spiritual realities present in everyday life by participating in the Seven Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony
- Sacraments are visible signs of God's grace. These signs, symbols, and sacred actions give believers who participate in them graces to deepen their friendship with God and to live out their faith by loving their neighbors near and far.
- By celebrating these powerful communal rituals, people become members of Christ's Church and encounter the Paschal Mystery.
- Sacraments originate from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.
- Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist are the Church's Sacraments of Initiation. These three have been linked since the early Church because together they form the foundation of Christian life.
 - Baptism is the beginning of a person's new life in Christ and initiates him or her into the Church.
 - When Catholics receive the Eucharist, they are strengthened by God and the Church for their spiritual journey.
 - Confirmation is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that seals or completes initiation into the Church, which began in Baptism.
- *To heal* means to "to save; to make well; to make whole." God's grace pours forth with an abundance of gifts: forgiveness, reconciliation, spiritual nourishment, strength, and peace. Imagine the beauty and power of the Church's Sacraments of Healing.
 - The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, also known as confession, brings people back into communion with God and the Church through God's healing gift of forgiveness.
 - Scripture tells us that Jesus also sent his Apostles to care for the sick. The early Church also ministered to people suffering from illnesses and diseases. The Catholic Church of today continues to minister to people suffering from serious health problems in the powerful Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.
- "Whom is God calling you to be?" is a question about the vocation or state of life that God is calling you to.
- Catholics believe everyone is called by God to grow in holiness and become a saint, for all people to grow in our love for God and one another.
- Through the vocation to the single or religious life, the priesthood or to married life, these are ways of living in which people can grow in holiness.

- The Catholic Church recognizes the priesthood and marriage as Sacraments at the Service of Communion instituted by Christ.
- The Sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony are sacramental ways of life in the Church that build up the People of God. These paths of service involve commitments.
- On the night before he died, Jesus gathered with his Apostles to celebrate a Passover meal, which became known as the Last Supper or the Lord's Supper. Jesus took bread and wine and changed it into his own Body and Blood. He said, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19).
- Every day, Catholics around the world relive this great event at the celebration of the Mass. The Eucharist is the reception of Jesus' true Body and Blood. This is not merely a symbolic gesture. In this mysterious act, the bread and wine truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The Sacrament of the Eucharist takes place within this ancient and sacred meal.
- Communion refers to receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord. The word *communion* comes from the Latin *com*, meaning "with, together," and *unus*, meaning "oneness, union"—to be *one together*. It is through this sacrament that members of the Church become one with God and one another.
- Making Jesus' original sacrifice present in the Eucharist also enables believers to enter more deeply into the Paschal Mystery in their own life. Jesus' Body and Blood is shared by believers as spiritual food for their journey through the dyings and risings in their everyday life.
- Sometimes the word *liturgy* is used as a synonym for the Mass.

Vocabulary words and concepts: spiritual reality, Seven Sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, Matrimony, grace, neighbors, Jesus Christ, Bible, Sacraments of Initiation, Paschal Mystery, Holy Spirit, Sacraments of Healing, Scripture, vocation, saint, Sacraments at the Service of Communion, ordained ministry, commitment, Passover, Last Supper, Mass, Church, true Body and Blood of Jesus, communion, spiritual food, liturgy

Module 11: Mary and the Saints

- Saints are men and women who receive God's grace and learn to live like Jesus by being faithful to God.
- The Catholic Tradition refers to saints as all the faithful people who have died and are officially recognized or canonized by the Church as models of faith.
- Believers celebrate the lives of the saints on each saint's feast day. The life stories of saints are passed on from generation to generation to inspire and help others face their own daily challenges.
- The term *saint* also has a broader meaning that includes all the faithful now with God in eternal life, and everyone striving to live the Gospel of Jesus.
- A special bond of love holds all saints together, creating the Communion of Saints.
- The Catholic devotion to the saints is anchored in the belief that we are not alone in this journey of life.
- However, one common misconception about Catholics is that they pray *to* the saints. This is not true. Because believers are in a community with the saints, they ask the saints in Heaven to pray for us. These are called intercessory prayers, like someone asking family or friends for prayers.
- A patron saint is a saint honored as a special intercessor or protector for a specific community, or for a particular cause or need.
- Of all the saints in Heaven, Mary holds a special place of honor. She was Jesus' first disciple, and because Mary was the mother of Jesus' entire person, including his divinity, Christians honor her as the Mother of God.
- When Jesus was on the cross, he spoke to his mother and the one called the Beloved Disciple, who symbolizes all Christians: "He said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother'" (John 19:26–27). This is why Mary is also known as the Mother of the Church.
- The Catholic Church teaches that because of God's special plan for Mary, she was conceived without Original Sin. This is called the Immaculate Conception. Mary remained sinless for her entire life. Because she did not suffer from Original Sin, at the end of her life she was assumed into Heaven, both body and soul. This event is called the Assumption.

Vocabulary words and concepts: Jesus, disciples, saints, grace, Tradition, canonized, feast day, eternal life, Gospel, Communion of Saints, devotion, intercessory prayer, patron saint, Saint Francis of Assisi, Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Hail Mary, Original Sin, Immaculate Conception, Assumption, Mary as role model of Christian discipleship, lives of the Saints

Module 12: The Last Things: Heaven, Hell and Purgatory

- Catholics, like all Christians, understand that the afterlife is a mystery and look to Jesus for clues as to what we can expect after this human life.
- For Christians, death is not final nor something to fear. Jesus' Resurrection from the dead gives hope for eternal life.
- Jesus used parables in the Scriptures to teach that there are serious consequences for our behavior, yet God is infinitely merciful and is always ready to welcome us into the Kingdom of God.
- Heaven is being united with God for eternity in complete happiness.
- Jesus used metaphors in the Scriptures to describe heaven. Two descriptions he used is Heaven as a great wedding feast (Matthew 22:2) and as a great mansion with room for all (John 14:2).
- The Catholic Tradition describes Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory not as actual places, but as states of being.
- Hell is the state of eternal separation from God. Suffering is experienced as the pain of being away from God, the ultimate source of all goodness and life.
- Purgatory is a state of final purification before Heaven. Those experiencing Purgatory are certainly on the path to Heaven.
- But because all humans have free will, each person always has a choice to turn toward or away from God.
- When people turn away, disconnect from, and ignore their neighbor, they get a taste of the separation from God that is Hell. When people turn toward, connect with, and love their neighbor, they get a taste of the heavenly life.
- Catholics, like all Christians, cling to hope in Jesus, who is victorious over sin and death.

Vocabulary words and concepts: mystery, Resurrection, death, eternal life, parable, Kingdom of God, Heaven, Purgatory, Hell, free will, choices, separation from God, afterlife, human dignity, sins, self-sacrificing love, happiness