

Catholicism Frequently Asked Questions



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Edited by Godwin A. Delali (GADEL)

St. Peter and Paul Catechism Ministry

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Why do Catholics Worship Mary?

Catholics **DO NOT** worship Mary, the Mother of Christ - as though she were a deity. Catholics are just as aware as Protestants that Mary was a human creature, and therefore not entitled to the honors which are reserved to God alone. What many non-Catholics mistake for adoration is a very profound love and veneration, nothing more. Mary is not adored, first because God forbids it, and secondly because the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, which is based on Divine Law, forbids it. Canon Law 1255 of the 1918 Codex strictly forbids adoration of anyone other than the Holy Trinity. However, Catholics do feel that Mary is entitled to a great measure of exaltation because, in choosing her as the Mother of Redemption, God Himself exalted her - exalted her more than any other human person before or since. Catholics heap tribute and honor on Mary because they earnestly desire to be "followers of God, as most dear children." (Ephesians 5:1). Mary herself prophesied: "For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because he that is mighty, hath done great things to me; and holy is his name." (Luke 1:48-49). Catholics know that every bit of the glory they give to Mary reflects to the glory of her divine Son, just as Mary magnified God, not herself, when Elizabeth blessed her. (Luke 1:41-55). They know that the closer they draw to her, the closer they draw to Him who was born of her. In the year 434 St. Vincent of Lerins defended Christian devotion to Mary this way: "Therefore, may God forbid that anyone should attempt to defraud Holy Mary of her privilege of divine grace and her special glory. For by a unique favor of our Lord and God she is confessed to be the most true and most blessed Mother of God."

Why do Catholics Pray to Mary and the Saints?

When Catholics pray to Mary and the other saints in Heaven they are not bypassing Christ, whom they acknowledge as the sole Mediator between God and man. They are going to Christ through Mary and the other saints. They are asking Mary and other saints to intercede for them before the throne of Christ in heaven. "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." (James 5:16) How much more availing is the unceasing prayer of the sinless Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ! St. Paul asked his fellow Christians to intercede for him: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph, as it did among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men; for not all have faith." (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2) And again: "I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company." (Romans 15:30-32) Christ must particularly approve of our going to Him through Mary, His Blessed Mother, because He chose to come to us through her. And at Cana, He performed His first miracle after a word from His Mother. (John 2:2-11)

It is clear in Sacred Scripture that the saints in Heaven will intercede for us before the throne of Christ if they are petitioned in prayer (Revelations 8:3-4), and it is clear in the records of primitive Christianity that the first Christians eagerly sought their intercession. Wrote St. John Chrysostom in the fourth century: "When thou perceivest that God is chastening thee, fly not to His enemies, but to His friends, the martyrs, the saints, and those who were pleasing to Him, and who have great power." If the saints have such power with God, how much more his own Mother.

Why do Catholics believe in a Place between Heaven and Hell Called "Purgatory"?

Purgatory is also called the Final Purification. All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

"If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." (1 Corinthians 3:15)

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:7)

"As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come." [St. Gregory the Great, Dial. 4, 39: PL 77, 396]

This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." (2 Maccabees 12:46) From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead:

"Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them." (St. John Chrysostom, 361)

Why do Catholics confess their Sins to a Priest?

Catholics confess their sins to priests because as it is clearly stated in Sacred Scripture - God in the Person of Jesus Christ authorized the priests of His church to hear confessions and empowered them to forgive sins in His Name. To the Apostles, the first priests of His Church, Christ said: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:21-23) Then again: "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18) Catholics confess their sins to priests because priests are God's duly authorized agents in the world, representing Him in all matters pertaining to the ways and means of attaining eternal salvation. When Catholics confess their sins to a priest they are, in reality, confessing their sins to God, for God hears their confessions and it is He who, in the final analysis, does the forgiving. If their confessions are not sincere, their sins are not forgiven.

By What Authority does the Pope Rule Over the Catholic Church?

The Pope enjoys, by divine institution, "supreme, full, immediate, and universal power in the care of souls". The Pope is the Bishop of Rome, who exercises universal jurisdiction over the whole Church as the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter. Jesus gave Peter special authority among the apostles (John 21:15-17) and signified this by changing his name from Simon to Peter, which means "rock" (John 1:42). He said Peter was to be the rock on which he would build his Church (Matt. 16:18).

In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Simon's new name was Kepha (which means a massive rock). Later this name was translated into Greek as Petros (John 1:42) and into English as Peter. Christ gave Peter alone the "keys of the kingdom" (Matt. 16:19) and promised that Peter's decisions would be binding in heaven. He also gave similar power to the other apostles (Matt. 18:18), but only Peter was given the keys, symbols of his authority to rule the Church on earth in Jesus' absence.

Christ, the Good Shepherd, called Peter to be the chief shepherd of his Church (John 21:15-17). He gave Peter the task of strengthening the other apostles in their faith, ensuring that they taught only what was true (Luke 22:31-32). Peter led the Church in proclaiming the gospel and making decisions (Acts 2:1- 41, 15:7-12).

Early Christian writings tell us that Peter's successors, the bishops of Rome (who from the earliest times have been called by the affectionate title of "pope," which means "papa"), continued to exercise Peter's ministry in the Church.

The term "pope" derives from the Latin for "father," papa (Greek, pappas), also used to refer to bishops and to priests in the Orthodox Churches. The Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria is also known by the title "pope." But in Western Christianity, this term refers exclusively to the Roman Pontiff, called His Holiness the Pope, who governs the universal Church as the successor to St. Peter. "The office uniquely committed by the Lord to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and to be transmitted to his successors, abides in the Bishop of the Church of Rome," who is "head of the College of Bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the Pastor of the Universal Church," and who possesses "by virtue of his office, . . . supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary jurisdiction power in the Church" (Canon 331).

The Pope is assisted in carrying out his office by the bishops, the cardinals and the various offices of the Roman Curia. The Pope also has an enormously important international role, as visible symbol of the unity of the Church and as a universally acknowledged spokesman for justice, for world peace, for morality, for the dignity of the human person and for the transcendent meaning of all life on earth. In recent years, this role has been exercised in particular through pastoral visits to many countries of the world by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II.

The pope is the successor to Peter as bishop of Rome. The world's other bishops are successors to the apostles in general.

Why Does the Catholic Bible have more Books than the Protestant Bible?

The "Canon" (derived from the Greek word for rule) of Scripture comprises books of the Bible received in the Church as authentically inspired and normative for the Faith. The Catholic Church, through her Popes and Councils, gathered together the separate books that early Christians venerated; formed a collection (drew up a list or catalog of inspired and apostolic writings); and declared that only these were the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament along with the Alexandrian Canon (aka Septuagint) of the Old Testament. The authorities responsible for settling and closing the "Canon" of Holy Scripture were the Councils of Hippo (393) and of Carthage (397 and 416) under the influence of St. Augustine (at the latter of which two Legatees were present from the Pope), and the Popes Innocent I in 405, and Gelasius, 494, both of whom issued lists of Sacred Scripture identical with that fixed by the Councils. The Church never admitted any other; and at the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century, and the Council

of Trent in the sixteenth, and the Council of the Vatican (Vatican I) in the nineteenth, she renewed her anathemas against all who should deny or dispute this collection of books as the inspired word of God.

The Protestant Bibles have deliberately excluded seven complete Books from the Old Testament that were in every collection and catalog of Holy Scripture from the fourth to the sixteenth century. Their names are Tobias, Baruch, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, I Maccabees, II Maccabees, together with seven chapters of the Book of Esther and 66 verses of the 3rd chapter of Daniel, commonly called "the Song of the Three Children". These were deliberately cut out of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament started in the third century B.C. in Alexandria, Egypt and completed around 100 B.C.), based on the criticisms and remarks of Luther, Calvin, and the Swiss and German Reformers. Were it not for the resistance of the more conservative Reformers, Luther would have excluded the Epistle of St. James (which he called "an Epistle of straw"), the Epistle of St. Jude, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Book of Revelation from the Protestant New Testament as well.

When did the Church established by Jesus Christ get the name Catholic?

Christ left the adoption of a name for His Church to those whom he commissioned to teach all nations. Christ called the spiritual society He established, "My Church" (Mt. xvi, 18), "the Church" (Mt. xviii, 17). In order to have a distinction between the Church and the Synagogue and to have a distinguishing name from those embracing Judaic and Gnostic errors we find St. Ignatius (50-107 A.D.) using the Greek word "Katholicos" (universal) to describe the universality of the Church established by Christ. St. Ignatius was appointed Bishop of Antioch by St. Peter, the Bishop of Rome. It is in his writings that we find the word Catholic used for the first time. St. Augustine, when speaking about the Church of Christ, calls it the Catholic Church 240 times in his writings.

What must I do to be saved?

To be saved, you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). However, **that's not all**. Sacred Scripture clearly shows other things you must also do to be saved:

- You must endure to the end. Matthew 10:22, Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13.
- You must accept the Cross (suffering). Matthew 10:38, Matthew 16:24-25, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Luke 14:27.
- You must be baptized with water. Mark 16:16, Titus 3:5, I Peter 3:20-21.
- You must be a member in God's true church. Acts 2:47.
- You must confess your sins. James 5:16, I John 1:9.
- You must keep the Commandments of God. Matthew 5:19-20, Matthew 7:21.
- You must heed the words of St. Peter, the first Pope (and his successors). Acts 11:13-14, Acts 15:7.
- You must eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus Christ. John 6:51-58, I Corinthians 10:16, I Corinthians 11:23-29.
- Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to His call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. CCC 1996, John 1:12-18, John 17:3, Romans 8:14-17, 2 Peter 1:3-4.

The only Church that meets all the requirements of Salvation is the Holy Catholic Church.

Aren't all those statues in the Catholic Church the same as worshipping graven images?

First, one must understand what a graven image is in the context of the Old Testament. To make a graven image is to create an image out of some medium, such as clay or wood, and worship it as a God. The statues or pictures of Mary are not worshipped as a God. If a Catholic worships a statue of Mary as a God, they are guilty of idolatry.

The Lord did not forbid the making of images. In fact, God commanded Moses to shape a brazen serpent. This serpent was able to cure the people of the serpent bite, if they looked upon it (Numbers 21:8). Later, when the people turned to idolatry of the serpent, Hezekiah had it destroyed (II Kings 18:4). Here you see the balance. Images are good, if they are helpful, but not if they encourage idolatry.

Moreover, the Lord commanded that the image of two Cherubim be constructed on the top of the Ark of the Covenant on either side of the Mercy seat. Was this the sin of idolatry? I think not.

Mary is the mother of God and the saints are the friends of God. If keeping their pictures or statues helps to inspire us to a more holy life, then it is a good thing. Don't you have pictures of your family in your home? Is this idolatry? Or when someone dies, should you destroy all images or pictures of them, lest you be guilty of worshipping them?

Why do Catholics submit to the authority of the Catholic Church and believe the Pope to be infallible?

Jesus told Peter he would establish his Church with him as the head, giving him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" and telling him that "whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:18-19). The "keys" signify authority and appear in the book of Isaiah foretelling that the Messiah would have "the key of the house of David" (Isaiah 22:22) and later in the book of Revelation when Jesus himself says, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17-18). Jesus giving Peter the "keys" signifies his appointment as Jesus' representative on Earth, or Vicar. At the Last Supper Jesus told Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus' prayer that Peter's "faith may not fail" assured him of what Catholics call Papal Infallibility, the belief that the Pope is guided perfectly by the Holy Spirit when proclaiming a matter of faith or morals. After Jesus' Resurrection, he commissioned Peter to "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17), confirming Peter as head of the Church even after Peter's denial. Peter was also the apostle who following the Descent of the Holy Spirit, told those in Jerusalem to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2: 37-38). Acts also demonstrates how the early Church listened to Peter to settle matters of dispute in the new Faith, such as the question about the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts to Christianity. "And after there had been much debate" Peter made the final decision, while "all the assembly kept silence..." (Acts 15:4-12).

After Jesus told Peter he would establish him as head of his Church and gave him the power to bind and loose, he gave the same power to the other disciples. "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). The authority of the Church, therefore, consists of the Pope and the Bishops united to him, represented by the disciples Jesus was addressing. We call this the Magisterium of the Church. Jesus told his disciples, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16) and before his Ascension, he commissioned all of them to, "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 lo, I

am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). He promised his disciples that after he ascended to Heaven, the Father would give them "another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him (John 14:16-18) and assured them, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:12-13).

St. Paul confirmed that the Church was the authority of the Christian faith in his first letter to Timothy: "I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

(Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:18-19; Revelation 1:17-18; Matthew 18:18; Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 10:16; Luke 22:31-32; John 14:16-18; John 14:26; John 16:12-13; John 21:17; Acts 2: 14-21, 37-38; Acts 15:4-12; 1 Timothy 3:14-15; 2 Timothy 3:14-17)

How can Catholics believe in so many things that aren't in the Bible?

In almost every case, our beliefs are in the Bible, though they require correct interpretation. However, the Catholic Church teaches that Divine Revelation consists of Sacred Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and Magisterial Teaching - the three are complementary and inseparable, just as the Trinity is inseparable.

The idea that the Bible is the final authority for Christians (called *Sola Scriptura*) cannot be true for a number of reasons:

a) The Bible never says that it is authoritative but clearly supports the Pope and the Church as authoritative. Even if it did state it was authoritative, what proof is that of its authenticity? Many religions have books that claim to be inspired by God - why would our Bible be any different? The Bible does state that "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17)." But this passage does not tell us which books are "inspired" nor could it since some of those books hadn't even been written when Paul wrote to Timothy.

b) The Bible itself says it can be misinterpreted and that not everything is contained within it:

"First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:20-21).

"So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

"But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

c) The books of the New Testament were not completed until the end of the First Century, and the Bible did not exist as such until the end of the 4th Century when the canon of books was determined by the Catholic Church at the Councils of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 and 419 A.D.). There were many writings by the Apostles that were not included as part of Sacred Scripture, such as the Gospel of James and the Apocalypse of Peter. In other words, the Bible only exists because it was defined by the Catholic Church, the sole authority Christians have for their belief in its inspired nature. Whether they realize it or not, our

Protestant brothers and sisters believe in the authority of a Bible written by and defined by the Catholic Church, a belief that contradicts the idea that the Bible alone is authoritative.

d) The Bible confirms that tradition must be maintained - not the spiritless practice of the Mosaic Law, which Jesus condemned...

"This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.' You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition. He went on to say, 'How well you have set aside the commandment of God in order to uphold your tradition!'" (Mark 7:6-9).

...but the traditional teaching that Jesus commissioned to the Apostles (Matthew 28:18-20).

"I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (1 Corinthians 11:2).

"So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

(Matthew 18:17-18; 28:18-20; Mark 7:6-9; John 21:25; Acts 2:42; Acts 8:31; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Timothy 3:15; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21, 3:15-16).

Why do Catholics have "extra" books in their Bible?

As stated above, the New Testament came into existence in the 4th Century when it was defined by the Catholic Church. The decisions of the Councils of Hippo and Carthage were later ratified by the councils of Second Nicea (787), Florence (1440), and Trent (1525-46). For over 1100 years, all Christians had the same books in their Bibles. It was not until the advent of Protestantism that the books of the Canon were called into question. Martin Luther wanted to remove (among other books) James, Hebrews, 2 Peter, and Revelation. A careful study of the books that were removed from the Protestant Bible reveals that the reason for their removal (or attempted removal) was mainly doctrinal: James 2:21-26 - refutes the Protestant doctrine of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone apart from perseverance in doing good (Sola Fide); 2 Peter 2:1-3 warned against "false prophets" within the Church who would "bring in destructive heresies"; 2 Maccabees 12:45 - perhaps the strongest Scriptural evidence of the existence of Purgatory; The Book of Judith - a prefigurement of the role of the Virgin Mary in defeating Satan.

There is no list of included books anywhere in the Bible, which leads us back to the inevitable conclusion that no Christian can believe the Bible is the inspired word of God unless he believes in the authority of the Catholic Church, the "pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15), who defined it.

(2 Maccabees 12:45; Matthew 19:26; John 10:16, 17:11; 1 Timothy 3:15; James 2:21-26; 2 Peter 2:1-3)

What do Catholics believe about the Virgin Mary? Why is she considered so important to Christianity?

a) Mary is the Mother of Jesus, the "Mother of the Lord," and thus the Mother of God. (Luke 2:7; Luke 1:43)

b) Mary is our spiritual Mother, since Jesus gave her to us from the Cross. Since she is the Mother of Christ, she is also the Mother of Christ's Body, the Church.

"When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' (John 19:26-27).

c) Mary was the first Christian. (Luke 1:26-38)

d) Mary always leads us to her Son. "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

e) Jesus worked his first public miracle at the request of his Mother. (John 2:1-11)

f) Mary is a reflection of God's beauty and glory.

"And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (Luke 1:46-48).

"For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness" (Wisdom 7:26).

g) Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant - just as the original Ark contained the tablets of the Old Covenant, the new Ark contained the Word of God himself - the divine personification of the New Covenant.

"Arise, O Lord, and go to thy resting place, thou and the ark of thy might" (Psalm 132:8)

"Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail. And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery" (Revelation 11:19 - 12:2).

h) Mary is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit and remained a Virgin throughout her entire life (Perpetual Virginity). See question 5.

i) By a singular privilege of God, Mary was conceived without original sin (Immaculate Conception), and as the "new Eve" she never committed even a minor sin throughout her entire life. She was "saved in advance" so that the Lord could enter the world without being defiled.

"You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you" (Song of Songs 4:7).

"My dove, my perfect one, is only one, the darling of her mother, flawless to her that bore her" (Song of Songs 6:9).

j) Because of her sinlessness, Mary was assumed body and soul into heaven at the end of her life (Assumption of the Virgin Mary).

"My beloved speaks and says to me: 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone... Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away'" (Song of Songs 2:10-11, 13).

"Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amana, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards" (Song of Songs 4:8).

k) Mary is the first of the Co-Redeemers because she cooperated in God's plan of Redemption by agreeing to becoming the Mother of the Lord, knowing the pain it would cause her, and by sharing in the sufferings of Jesus throughout his entire life.

"And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word'" (Luke 1:38).

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church..." (Colossians 1:24).

"For the infant Church was the fruit of the Cross and Resurrection of her Son. Mary, who from the beginning had given herself without reserve to the person and work of her Son, could not but pour out upon the Church, from the very beginning, her maternal self-giving. After her Son's departure, her motherhood remains in the Church as maternal mediation: interceding for all her children, the Mother cooperates in the saving work of her Son, the Redeemer of the world. In fact the Council teaches that the 'motherhood of Mary in the order of grace... will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.' ... Mary's cooperation shares, in its subordinate character, in the universality of the mediation of the Redeemer, the one Mediator" (Pope John Paul II, Mother of the Redeemer).

l) In virtue of her complete union with God as daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, and spouse of the Spirit, Mary maternally mediates between humanity and God.

"For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord; but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death" (Proverbs 8:36).

"Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom" (Wisdom 7:27-28).

"This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix. This, however, is so understood that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator. No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful, and as the one goodness of God is radiated in different ways among his creatures, so also the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source" (Lumen Gentium 62).

m) Mary is our greatest Advocate in heaven, who along with the other saints receives our prayers and petitions and intercedes for us before the throne of God (Tobit 12:15, Revelation 5:8).

n) Mary spent more time with Jesus than any other human being. She nurtured and instructed Jesus from his infancy until the beginning of his Public Mission.

"And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:51-52).

o) Mary was crucified in her heart at the foot of the Cross, where she watched her Son die; she cooperated with God's plan until the bitter end.

"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35).

"So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25).

p) Catholics do not worship Mary but honor her, just as we honor other Saints (Code of Canon Law 1186). Adoration is reserved for God alone. By honoring Mary, we imitate Jesus by fulfilling the 4th Commandment to "honor your father and your mother" (Deuteronomy 5:16).

(Deuteronomy 5:16; Tobit 12:15; Psalm 132:8; Proverbs 8:22-36; Ecclesiasticus 24:1-22; Song of Songs 2:10-13, 4:7-8, 6:9-10; Wisdom 7:25-28; Isaiah 60:13; Jeremiah 3:15-16; Luke 1:26-38, 1:41-49, 2:7, 2:51-52; John 2:1-11, 19:25-27; Colossians 1:24; Revelation 5:8, 11:19-12:2)

Why do Catholics believe Mary was a virgin throughout her entire life? Doesn't the Bible say Jesus was her "firstborn" and talk about Jesus' "brothers"?

"And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2:7).

The term "first-born" has great significance in Jewish history, going back to the covenant God made with Moses after leading the Israelites out of Egypt. The Jewish feast of Passover recalls the night the Lord struck down the first-born of the Egyptians, but "passed over" the homes of the Jews who marked their doors with the "blood of the lamb." (Exodus 12:7). Because of this favor, "The Lord told Moses, 'Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.'" (Exodus 13:1-2). The Jewish meaning of "first-born", therefore, does not imply the existence of other children. St. Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." (Romans 8:29). St. Paul, who was a zealous Jew prior to his miraculous conversion, was well aware of the significance of the term "first-born" and used it to indicate Jesus as our brother, through whose merits we become adopted sons of God.

"And his mother and his brethren came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brethren are outside, asking for you.' And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brethren?' And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brethren! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.'" (Mark 3:31-35).

The Jews regarded cousins as brothers and sisters. In fact they did not have a separate word for "cousin" as we do. The brethren referred to here were Jesus' cousins, James and Judas of Alpheus, the brother of St. Joseph (see Matthew 13:55 and 27:56). Even Protestants will admit that there is no historical evidence that Mary had other children. Surely this information would have survived history, at least within the tradition of the Catholic Church, and yet no such evidence exists. If indeed Mary did have other children, why did Jesus choose to give her to John from the Cross instead of one of his "brothers"?

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus." (Matthew 1:24-25).

The Greek word translated until does not imply anything about what happened after the incident described. Another example of the use of this word is 1 Corinthians 15:25: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Obviously Jesus will still

reign after he has subjected his enemies, so we cannot infer anything about Mary and Joseph's relationship from the passage in Matthew.

"For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:25).

"The Church has always professed her belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary. The most ancient texts, when referring to the conception of Jesus, call Mary simply 'virgin', inferring that they considered this quality a permanent fact with regard to her whole life. The early Christians expressed this conviction of faith in the Greek term *aeiparthenos*-'ever virgin'-created to describe Mary's person in a unique and effective manner, and to express in a single word the Church's belief in her perpetual virginity" (Pope John Paul II, General Audience, August 28, 1996).

(Exodus 12:7; Exodus 13:1-2; Numbers 3:11-13; Wisdom of Solomon 7:25; Ezekiel 44:2; Romans 8:29; Matthew 1:24-25 with 1 Corinthians 15:25; Mark 3:31-35 with Matthew 13:55 and 27:56; Luke 2:7)

Why do Catholics believe the Eucharist is the true Body and Blood of Christ?

Jesus gave his Church many wonderful gifts, but far above all of these is the gift he gave us of his very self in the Eucharist. Every time a priest says the words of the consecration at Mass, the bread and wine become the very Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper on the night he instituted the priesthood. Gathered in the upper room the night before the beginning of his passion, "Jesus took bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Matthew 26:26-28). What Jesus had earlier done with the multiplication of loaves and fish to feed the bodies of his followers he now did with the Bread of Heaven to feed their souls.

This first Eucharist fulfilled what Jesus had said while preaching: "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." (John 6:48-51). The Jews disputed among themselves, asking how Jesus could give them his flesh to eat. He replied, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." (John 6:53-56).

Many of his disciples, horrified at the prospect of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, left him. Jesus did not explain at that time that his flesh and blood were to be contained in the Eucharist, because he wanted to see who among his disciples would remain loyal to him despite his seemingly barbaric suggestion. Seeing many leave him, Jesus turned to the Apostles and asked, "'Will you also go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'" (John 6:67-69). Certainly, the Apostles and the disciples who remained with Jesus were just as confused and dumbfounded as the departed disciples regarding what Jesus had just said, but they put their complete trust in him in spite of their human doubt and confusion.

It is crucial to note how Jesus responded to those who questioned his meaning when he told them they would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood. He did not say that he was only speaking figuratively, but affirmed his intention for them to truly consume his flesh and blood. John wrote his Gospel in ancient Greek and used a form of the word "phago" for "eat" when Jesus first began talking to the Jews. This word was the normal term for eating. But when Jesus clarified his meaning to the Jews, John used the

word "trogo" for "eat," which translates literally as "crunch between the teeth." Jesus, who spoke in Aramaic, purposefully selected a different expression for "eat" in order to leave no doubt as to his meaning. It was this clarification which led many of his disciples to leave him. Had his answer assured them that he was only speaking figuratively, there would have been no reason for them to do so.

St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians confirms the belief in the early Church of Jesus' true presence in the Eucharist: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is not a participation in the Body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drink without discerning the Body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

The writings of the early Church Fathers also unquestionably support our belief in the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist:

"You must not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized in the Lord's name. For in reference to this the Lord said, 'Do not give what is sacred to dogs.' After you have finished your meal, say grace in this way: 'We thank you, holy Father, for your sacred name which you have lodged in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have revealed through Jesus, your child. To you be glory forever. Almighty Master, 'you have created everything' for the sake of your name, and have given men food and drink to enjoy that they may thank you. But to us you have given spiritual food and drink and eternal life through Jesus, your child'" (The Didache).

"Pay close attention to those who have wrong notions about the grace of Jesus Christ, which has come to us, and note how at variance they are with God's mind. They care nothing about love: they have no concern for widows or orphans, for the oppressed, for those in prison or released, for the hungry or the thirsty. They hold aloof from the Eucharist and from services of prayer, because they refuse to admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which, in his goodness, the Father raised [from the dead]. Consequently those who wrangle and dispute God's gift face death. They would have done better to love and so share in the resurrection... Nobody must do anything that has to do with the Church without the bishop's approval. You should regard that Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Where the bishop is present, there let the congregation gather, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. (Letter of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans).

"Be careful, then, to observe a single Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and one cup of his blood that makes us one, and one altar, just as there is one bishop along with the presbytery and the deacons, my fellow slaves. In that way whatever you do is in line with God's will" (Letter of Ignatius to the Philadelphians).

"For when the mixed cup and the bread that has been prepared receive the Word of God, and become the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, and by these our flesh grows and is confirmed, how can they say that flesh cannot receive the free gift of God, which is eternal life, since it is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and made a member of him? ... And just as the wooden branch of the vine, placed in the earth, bears fruit in its own time-and as the grain of wheat, falling into the ground and there dissolved, rises with great increase by the Spirit of God, who sustains all things, and then by the wisdom of God serves for the use of men, and when it receives the Word of God becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ-so also our bodies which are nourished by it, and then fall into the earth and are dissolved therein, shall rise at the proper time, the Word of God bestowing on them this rising again, to the glory of God the Father" (Irenaeus - Doctrine of Redemption in Reply to the Gnostics).

"Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God's Eucharist and to praise him. For when you meet with frequency, Satan's powers are overthrown and his destructiveness is undone by the unanimity of your faith. There is nothing better than peace, by which all strife in heaven and earth is done away" (The Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians)

(Matthew 26:26-28; John 6:35-69; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:27-19; The Didache; Letter of Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans; Letter of Ignatius to the Philadelphians; Irenaeus - Doctrine of Redemption in Reply to the Gnostics; The Letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians)

Why do Catholics believe artificial birth control is immoral?

The Lord commanded Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) indicating that he wanted them to give themselves to each other in order to allow him to bring about new life. God's command had to do with the reproductive aspect of sex, with the physical pleasure being a wonderful accompanying gift; to deny God his right to create new life out of a selfish desire for mere physical gratification is a serious sin. In fact, God slew Onan for committing this very sin (Genesis 38:6-10). Ananias and his wife Sapphira were struck down for committing the same type of sin, what St. Peter called lying to God (Acts 5:1-11); artificial birth control forces those who practice it to do just that.

Before 1930, every Christian Church condemned artificial birth control as objectively evil. The Episcopal Church was the first to relax sanctions against it, and since then every Protestant denomination has allowed it. The connection between the birth control pill, the sexual revolution, AIDS, and abortion is impossible to overlook. The pill in fact causes abortions in the event of an unwanted pregnancy by preventing the baby from attaching to its mother's womb and causing it to starve to death.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Before we were ever conceived in our mothers' wombs, we were conceived in the Eternal Mind of God. We were his children even before our physical existence began; how then could we deny him the right to see his very own children born?

Other forms of artificial birth control that are not abortifacients are considered immoral because they deny God the right to bring about new life if He so desires. Marital intercourse is a very sacred act. God created sex so that married people could unite in the most intimate way while continuing the human species. To separate one of these motives from the other contradicts God's purpose in giving us the gift of sex. Natural methods of birth control are moral, but only encouraged in cases of grave necessity such as financial hardship, because they do not deny God the ability to bring about life if He so desires. True financial hardship does not include postponing children until we can get our big screen TV, stereo, and new cars paid off. There is an inherent difference of attitude in the couple who says "No" to God and the couple who says "We don't think it's a good idea right now, but we leave the decision to You."

(Genesis 1:28, 38:6-10; Jeremiah 1:5)

Are Catholics permitted to engage in sexual activity before marriage?

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Catholics are not permitted to engage in intimate sexual relationships before marriage and are responsible for ensuring their sexual relationship in marriage is chaste. God created sex for married couples so that they could continue the human race and enjoy intimacy as they "become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Sexual activity before marriage abuses God's gift of sexuality by reducing it to the pursuit of physical pleasure and was repeatedly condemned in the Old Testament as well as by Jesus and his apostles (Leviticus 21:9; Sirach 23:16-17; Matthew 15:19; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5).

"Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does" (1 Corinthians 7:1-4).

"Let marriage be honored among all and the marriage bed be kept undefiled, for God will judge the immoral and adulterers" (Hebrews 13:4).

Married Christians are challenged to keep their sexual relationship a holy one by using the gift of sex in the manner God intended. Sexual acts which serve only for physical gratification and are not open to the creation of life are immoral because they deny God his rights as Creator and are forms of artificial birth control. God intended for sexual intimacy to be pleasurable and fulfilling, but if we abuse this great gift, our marriage will suffer. True intimacy in marriage is impossible if the spouses do not respect each other's bodies and treat them as "temple[s] of the Holy Spirit."

"When the door was shut and the two were alone, Tobias got up from the bed and said, 'Sister, get up, and let us pray that the Lord may have mercy upon us.' And Tobias began to pray, 'Blessed art thou, O God of our fathers, and blessed by thy holy and glorious name for ever. Let the heavens and all thy creatures bless thee. Thou madest Adam and gavest him Eve his wife as a helper and support. From them the race of mankind has sprung. Thou didst say, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself.' And now, O Lord, I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her.' And she said with him, 'Amen.' Then they both went to sleep for the night" (Tobit 8:4-9).

Christian spouses should regard each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord and should always bear in mind that though "one flesh" each of them still belongs to God. Spouses who have an intimate prayer life together will have the greatest intimacy in their sexual relationship, too, since sex is a union of the souls as well as the bodies.

The positive aspects of waiting until marriage are all too obvious in our times. The effects of the "sexual revolution" have been nothing less than catastrophic - legalized abortion, AIDS and other diseases, unwanted/unloved children, divorce, adultery... Being sexually active before marriage is a self-destructive lifestyle and will always lead to unhappiness, even if the present pleasure deceives us.

(Genesis 2:24; Leviticus 21:9; Tobit 8:4-9; Sirach 23:16-17; Matthew 15:19; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 19-20; 7:1-4; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 13:4).

Why do Catholics pray to saints instead of praying directly to God?

First, it is important to point out that Catholics do pray directly to God. Sometimes, however, they look to the community of believers to bring their prayers before God. In order to understand why Catholics pray to Saints it is necessary to understand what Catholics mean when they talk about the "Communion of Saints" and the "mystical Body of Christ". The word "communion" means unity. The term "Communion of Saints" refers to the unity of all Christians: the Church Militant on Earth, the Church Suffering in Purgatory, and the Church Triumphant in Heaven (Mark12:26-27). In other words, all believers who are committed to following the teachings of Christ are part of one family. This one family of believers is also called the "mystical Body of Christ". The unity of all Christians can be found many places in the Bible. One example is John 15:5, where Christ says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Followers of Christ are one with Christ and are therefore part of one body.

This same idea is also found in Romans 12:5: "so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." As a community of believers, we need the help and support of others. We often ask a friend or loved one to pray for us during hard times. Catholics believe that this community of believers also extends to Saints, who are already united to God in heaven. Romans 8:38-39 shows us that death cannot separate us from Christ or, therefore, from other Christians who make up the one Body of Christ: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come,

nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Because of this supernatural connection, Catholics ask Saints to pray for them and help them to follow in the steps of Jesus, just as they would ask a friend or relative to pray for them. When we ask people to pray for us or for some intention, we are asking for their intercession in petitioning God on our behalf. If we believe that the prayers of our friends and loved ones are heard by God, why would we doubt that those who have fought the good fight and preceded us into the perfection of heaven would not be able to intercede for us?

The Archangel Raphael told Tobit he was "one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One" (Tobit 12:15). In fact it was the intercession of the Archangel that led to Tobit and his daughter in law being healed (Tobit 12:14). If the saints in heaven are like the angels (Mark 12:25, Luke 20:36), surely their petitions are heard by God as well.

St. Paul tells us that "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God" (Romans 3:10-11). And St. James tell us that "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16). If we are not righteous, shouldn't we seek the intercession of those who are? Praying to the Saints pleases God because it is humble. We are not relying on our own merits to ask for God's favor, but on the merits of those who have already proven themselves worthy of eternal life. By doing this, we enable the Saints in Heaven to glorify God by seeking his blessings on our behalf. If we really knew the gift we have of our family in heaven, we would never for a moment cease praying to them for everything we need. One of the requirements for a person to be formerly canonized as a Saint is to have two confirmed miracles attributed to his or her intercession. In other words, a Saint is not only someone who can intercede for us, but someone we know already has!

(Tobit 12:15; Matthew 18:10; Mark 12:25-27; Luke 20:34-38; John 15:1-8; Romans 3:10-11 with James 5:16; Hebrews 12:22-23; Revelation 5:8; Revelation 8:3-4)

Why do Catholics go to a priest to confess their sins when they can just confess directly to Jesus?

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained' (John 20:22-23). Jesus himself established the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as he did all of the other Sacraments. When we confess our sins to a priest, we are in the presence of Jesus himself. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16).

No mere man can forgive sins; only God can (Mark 2:7), which is why the priest performs the absolution "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." One of the primary reasons Jesus wanted the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be a personal encounter was so that the penitent would hear the words of absolution and truly believe he was forgiven. We sometimes wonder if God really hears us when we tell him we are sorry. During the absolution we hear not the priest but Jesus Christ himself telling us we are indeed forgiven.

True (perfect) contrition and a firm commitment to avoid falling back into sin are required for us to receive God's forgiveness; however, in confessing to a priest, even imperfect contrition (fear of the just punishment we deserve) is enough for our sins to be

forgiven. And don't forget, you MUST confess any mortal sin to a priest prior to receiving the Eucharist even if you "know" you are truly sorry for your sin and are forgiven. The Sacraments are the primary means of Christians receiving God's grace - beginning with the greatest Sacrament of the Eucharist, they are the greatest gifts God has given us to help us to remain in a state of grace and live a holy life. We should strive to go to confession as a prevention instead of a cure!

(Mark 2:7; John 20:22-23; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; James 5:14-15)

Why do Catholics baptize babies?

In the Old Testament, the Jews were required to circumcise infant males as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:12-14). The Sacrament of Baptism replaced circumcision for Christians: "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11-12). If circumcision was performed on infants, and baptism replaced circumcision, it makes sense that infants should be baptized.

Catholics believe that baptism wipes away all sin, including the original sin that we inherit from Adam and Eve. At baptism, we also receive the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38-39, Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." Jesus makes clear the importance of baptism in John 3:5, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." He also says in Mark 16:16, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Because of Jesus' emphasis of the importance of this Sacrament, the Apostles baptized whole households, including infants (Acts 16:15, 16:33, 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

There are no Bible passages that forbids infant baptism. In fact, Jesus tells us that little children are not to be kept from him: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mark 10:14-15).

The Church Father's writings are clear about this practice as well: "Baptize first the children; and if they can speak for themselves, let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them" (St. Hippolytus of Rome, The Apostolic Tradition, 215 AD).

(Genesis 17:12-14 with Colossians 2:11-12; Mark 10:14-15; 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38-39, 16:15, 16:31-34, 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16; The Apostolic Tradition)

Why can't priests be married? Weren't some of the Apostles married?

Yes, some of the Apostles were married. Priests have not always been required to be unmarried. The Church has used its authority to require a celibate priesthood except in certain cases (some of the Eastern Rites allow married clergy and dispensations can be granted to priests who convert from other religions that allowed them to be married). This is a discipline of the Church, not a doctrine, and therefore has changed throughout Church history. A celibate priesthood reinforces the urgency of the Kingdom of God and frees our ministers from the obligations of family life which would detract from their priestly duties:

"I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided" (1 Corinthians 7:32-34).

The sacrifice of a physical relationship also enables the priest to unite more intimately with God, benefiting the entire Church:

"For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:12).

(Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:32-34)

Why do Catholics call priests "Father" when Jesus told us not to call anyone "Father"?

"Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted'" (Matthew 23:1-12).

Jesus' instruction when viewed in the context of the entire passage shows that what he was forbidding was giving honor and recognition reserved for God alone to men. If taken literally, we would all be sinning by referring to our biological fathers as "father." This was not the intention of the Lord, rather it was to remind us that God is the One Father, Teacher, and Master of us all.

Jesus himself referred to Abraham as a "father" in one of his parables:

"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead'" (Luke 16:29-31).

Even St. Paul referred to others as "fathers" in his letters, often referring to Abraham as the father of believers and even calling himself a "father in Christ Jesus" to those whom he wrote:

"I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning" (1 John 2:13-14)

"The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised" (Romans 4:11-12).

"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants - not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' - in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:16-17).

"I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:14-15).

Shortly before his martyrdom, St. Stephen also spoke to the "fathers":

"And the high priest said, 'Is this so?' And Stephen said: 'Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran...'" (Acts 7:1-2).

This question highlights one of the most common errors people make when quoting the Bible to refute Catholic theology - taking a single sentence out of context and applying it as an absolute truth. The Bible can only be understood in its totality. We would not read one page of American history and attempt to deduce the entire course of our country's past, so why would we try to do that with the word of God?

Catholics call priests "father" in recognition of their role in our lives - to act as our fathers in Christ Jesus just as St. Paul did. But we never forget that God is still the One Father, Teacher, and Master of us all.

(Matthew 23:9; Luke 16:29-31; 1 John 2:13-14; Acts 7:1-2; Romans 4:11-12; Romans 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 4:14-15)