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LOYOLAPRESS.

A JESUIT MINISTRY

3441 N. Ashland Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60657
(800) 621-1008
www.loyolapress.com

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Nilil Obstat

Reverend John G. Lodge, SSL, STD
Censor Deputatus
May 9, 2008

Imprimatur

Reverend John F. Canary, STL, DMin
Vicar General
Archdiocese of Chicago
May 12, 2008

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Cover design by Mia Basile

Interior design by Maggie Hong and Donna Antkowiak

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For more information related to the English translation of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, see www.loyolapress.com/romanmissal.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Paprocki, Joe.

A well-built faith: a Catholic's guide to knowing and sharing what we believe / Joe Paprocki.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8294-2757-8

ISBN-10: 0-8294-2757-0

1. Catholic Church—Doctrines. 2. Theology, Doctrinal—Popular works. I. Title.
BX1754.P34 2008
282—dc22

2008014205

Printed in USA

11 12 13 RRD 10 9 8 7 6 5

disciples is our great commission and he gives us an indication of how we are to do this: by baptizing and by teaching.

Jesus himself identified what is needed for a firm foundation in the Christian life—faith, hope, love, forgiveness, compassion, mercy, justice, and so on—but he didn't stop there. He showed us, through his own life example, how this firm foundation is built and strengthened. This task of

Following Jesus requires not only information but transformation.

building faith and making disciples of Christ is known as *evangelization*. And it is the Church's most important task. Pope Paul VI said this boldly in his apostolic exhortation *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, "The Church exists in order to evangelize." To evangelize is to call people to conversion—to call people from following misguided paths to following Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To make a Christian is to impart a way of life. This means that becoming a follower of Jesus—a disciple—requires not only *information* but also *transformation*. We need to *know* certain things to be a disciple of Jesus, but we also need to *do* specific things to live as his followers.

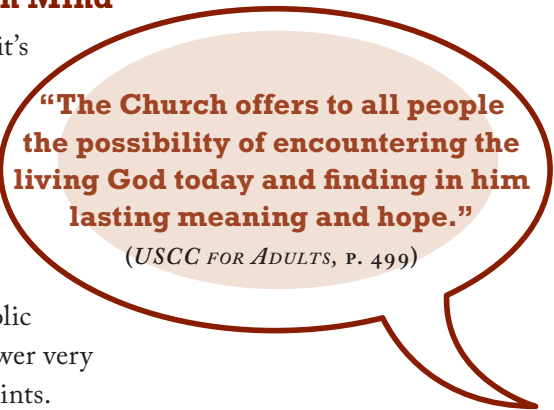
Beginning with the End in Mind

When you build something, it's always good to begin with the end in mind.

When it comes to forming Catholics in faith, we, too, should begin with the end in mind.

So, just what is an adult Catholic supposed to "look like"? The answer very simply is: we are all to become saints.

Of course, few if any of us will ever be canonized as saints. However, the church has always had another understanding of the word *saints*. The early church referred to all of the faithful followers of Jesus as *the saints*. And how did the saints live? "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the



"The Church offers to all people the possibility of encountering the living God today and finding in him lasting meaning and hope."

(USCC FOR ADULTS, P. 499)

The Creed (Holding on to Faith)

Believing is something that we do, not only with our heads, but also with our hearts. The following story illustrates this.

A stunt man was thrilling crowds gathered at the Niagara Falls, making his way across a tightrope that stretched from one end of the Falls to the other while riding a unicycle and carrying another person on his shoulders! As he and his passenger successfully dismounted on solid ground, the crowd broke into wild applause. The stunt man thanked the crowd and asked, “How many of you truly believe that I can do that again?” Having just witnessed the amazing stunt, everyone in the crowd raised their hand. The stunt man then mounted his unicycle and pointed to his shoulders asking, “Alright, then, who’s next?”

To believe is to enter into a relationship with another and to place our trust in that person. Until that happens, what we have is not a belief, but an idea. An idea evolves into a belief when it makes the leap from the head to the heart. Belief or faith is not blind. It is grounded in reason. We do not intimately love another person unless we have good reason (and some degree of evidence) to think that this person can be trusted. In the same way, we place our faith in God, not blindly, but based on good reason and some degree of evidence that God can be trusted. What is that evidence? Namely, the story of salvation history and the living witness of other followers of Christ. The Sacred Scriptures tell us the story of how God has been faithful to his people since the dawn of creation. The living witness of the saints—those canonized and those quietly leading lives of faith—provides us with credible evidence of the trustworthiness of God. Our own experience can also lead us to believe that God can be trusted. And yet, in the end, we have no proof, no guarantee—only an invitation to trust. And so, when we say in the Creed, “I believe in one God,” we do so at our own risk.

**Belief or faith is not blind.
It is grounded in reason.**

The Sacraments (Expressing Faith)

To be sacramental is to express beyond words. Catholics are sacramental because human beings are sacramental. Humans express love in a variety of

God Started It—And They Responded

Take a look at these examples from Scripture to see how God initiated the invitation and how folks responded.

- Genesis 12:1-9 (the call of Abram)
- Exodus 3: 1-14 (the call of Moses)
- Isaiah 6:1-10 (the call of Isaiah)
- Jeremiah 1:4-10 (the call of Jeremiah)
- Matthew 5:18-22 (the call of the first disciples)
- Luke 1: 26-38 (the call of Mary)
- Acts of the Apostles 9:1-9 (the call of Paul)

The central thread of Sacred Scripture is God's unrelenting pursuit of his people and the challenge for his people to respond to God's invitation. This same dynamic holds true for us today. We simply cannot be spiritually proactive. God has already taken the first step. Since the moment of our birth, God has been pursuing us, seeking us out, and inviting us to a deeper relationship with him. The saints were not people who were spiritually proactive. Rather, they were people who were highly responsive to God's invitation. Understanding this dynamic is crucial, because it enables us to place the spiritual horse before the spiritual cart, so to speak. Instead of making it our responsibility to pursue God, we can turn our attention to God's pursuit of us—his revelation—and seek proper ways to respond. Like working on an assembly line, we don't start from scratch. God started it.

Thy Will Be Done

Of course, Jesus' entire life is a portrait of how to respond to God. In the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, there is a poignant scene in the Garden of



"Couldn't I talk to a burning bush or something?"

Gethsemane in which the character of Jesus prays to his heavenly Father about his impending death.

After all I've tried for three years seems like ninety
Why then am I scared to finish what I started
What you started—I didn't start it

The character of Jesus comes to the realization that it is not of his own doing that he has come to this moment, but is a result of following his Father's will. It is only after this realization that the character of Jesus is able to utter the words, "still, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

When we recognize that God is the initiator, the instigator, the proactive One, we come to realize that our task in life is to discern God's will and to respond as Jesus did, "thy will be done."

There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "All right, then, have it your way."

—C. S. LEWIS

Humility

Understanding the dynamic of *revelation*—that God has taken the initiative to reveal himself to us in hopes of entering into a loving relationship—is the first step toward living a life of *humility*. Why? Because it is the first step in realizing that "it's not about us"—it's about God and what God is doing in our lives. Revelation is about God revealing himself, drawing attention to himself, so that we might come to recognize him more clearly and respond. Saints are not people who draw attention to themselves, but to God.

John the Baptist said, "He must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30).

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!

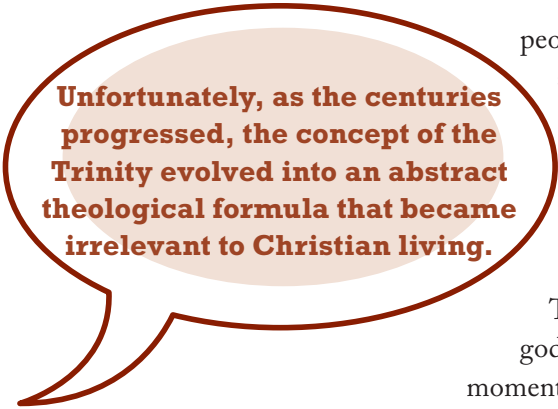
Today, we live in a society that tells us in a variety of ways that, "it's all about you!" Revelation is God's not-so-gentle reminder that "it's not about you . . . it's about what I (God) am doing in your life." For many of us, this is a *Copernican revolution*. Remember Copernicus? He was the Polish astronomer and mathematician who proposed that the earth revolved around the sun and not the other way around. For us, revelation is God's way of reminding us that our lives revolve around him, not the other way around.

How Do Catholics Interpret the Bible?

The essence of the Catholic approach to understanding the Bible can be summed up this way: everything in the Bible is *true* . . . but not necessarily *fact*. This statement is not meant to be tricky or gimmicky. Rather, it points out that truth and fact are not always the same thing. We can say that it is “raining cats and dogs” to communicate truth without using facts. We call this figurative language. There are parts of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, that rely on figurative language to express God’s truth. Catholics believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, meaning that the Bible makes no mistakes when it comes to communicating the absolute *truth* of God. At the same time, the Bible is not always accurate when relating *facts*. The creation stories in Genesis are not intended to teach scientific facts about the beginnings of the universe. They are however true stories, teaching us the absolute essential truth about God’s relationship with all of creation:

- ⊕ **God is the author of all things and of all life.**
- ⊕ **Human beings are made in the divine image.**
- ⊕ **God brought order out of chaos.**
- ⊕ **All of creation is good.**
- ⊕ **Humankind has been given dominion (stewardship) over the earth’s resources.**

Catholics do not have to choose between creationism on the one hand and Darwin’s theory of evolution on the other. We recognize that the Bible teaches religious truth and that science teaches scientific truth. We need both, and we see no conflict between faith and science. Simply put, Catholics believe that the Bible is the Word of God and everything in it is true. We simply do not take every line of the Bible literally. (To learn more about how Catholics understand the Bible, see my book *The Bible Blueprint: A Catholic’s Guide to Understanding and Embracing God’s Word*, Loyola Press.)



Unfortunately, as the centuries progressed, the concept of the Trinity evolved into an abstract theological formula that became irrelevant to Christian living.

people began to see God as a distant supreme being who needs to battle other lesser beings to get our attention. As a result, people did not see God as someone who was intimately involved in our everyday living. They saw life more as profane and godless, except for those occasional moments when God intervened.

God Is Love

How unfortunate that people have come to see God as a distant supreme being. A closer look at our Creed reveals a much different understanding of God. In the Nicene Creed, we say that we believe that Jesus is “consubstantial with the Father” and that the Holy Spirit, “proceeds from the Father and the Son.” This means that we understand God, not as an individual but as a community of love. In other words, God’s very essence is loving relationship. When we say that God is love, something we teach to the littlest of children, we are recalling the love that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is why love of neighbor is so critical in Christianity: because loving relationship is the very essence of God and we most reflect the image of God when we live in loving relationship with our neighbors. In fact, God does not just have a loving relationship—God *is* loving relationship. Love is not just a trait of God but is the very essence of God.

NO SUPREME BEING?

Did you know that Catholics do not believe in a supreme being? Truth is, we don’t believe that God is a distant supreme being; we don’t believe that God is a supreme being at all. A supreme being is a being that is simply superior to other beings. God is the Creator of human beings. God is not a being, but is the very ground of being—the very essence of being. So, what is God, if not a being? God is God. That’s why he told Moses, “I Am who Am.” In other words, God just is.

In the book of Deuteronomy, God states the case very bluntly: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life . . .” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Jesus echoed this when he said, “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). So, just what is all this talk about life and death?

The Book of Genesis gives us a clue. Out of selfless love, God gave Adam and Eve the gift of free will so that they could freely choose to share in his love and divine life. Of course, Adam and Eve, representing the first humans, chose to reject this love and seek fulfillment elsewhere. As a result, sin entered the world and along with it, suffering and death. Death, then, is the ultimate consequence of humankind’s sinful choices. Thus, sin is not merely a weakness that we can overcome through our own efforts—because we cannot overcome death, which is the ultimate consequence of sin. This is not to suggest, however, that any one person’s death is directly related to their own sinful actions. It means that humankind, as a whole, experiences death because we, as a whole, have chosen a condition in life that seeks fullness of life in places other than God. As a result, we need a savior—a redeemer.

“Fear defeats more people than any other one thing in the world.”

(RALPH WALDO EMERSON)

If this were not true, then why are people afraid of death? Throughout human history, death has been our greatest fear, because it has been seen as the end of all things; the cessation of life; our final demise.

That is, until Jesus came along.

ORIGINAL SIN

As a kid, I always thought it was unfair that the rest of us had to suffer the stain of original sin, all because of the blunders of Adam and Eve. As adults we realize that, in essence, Adam and Eve represent us. Original sin is the tendency to choose, as Adam and Eve chose, our own desires over the will of God. Because of original sin, we are powerless in the face of sin and its ultimate consequence—death. We can only be saved by the One who has conquered sin and death: Jesus Christ. In baptism, original sin is “washed away,” meaning that in Jesus we have embraced the only means by which we can overcome our own desires and conform to the will of God.

Jesus Overcomes Our Greatest Fear

When Jesus became human (we call this the Incarnation), he took on our human condition. Jesus was not God pretending to be human, nor was he human pretending to be God. He was not half-God, half-human. Jesus, without losing his divinity (he is “God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God”), became fully human (“was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man”). That means that Jesus entered into our sinful state. Like us, he faced temptation. Unlike us, however, Jesus triumphed over temptation and sin. Jesus also faced suffering and death (“he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried”). Jesus faced not just any death, but the horrible death of an innocent victim—public execution. However, Jesus’ battle with sin and death did not end in defeat. God raised Jesus up (“[he] rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”). Jesus, through his Resurrection, overcame death, that most ultimate consequence of sin. Jesus’ Resurrection is the ultimate triumph, because now we know that death is not the end. In Jesus, death—our greatest fear—is overcome. Thus, we are saved because even death cannot separate us from the love of Christ Jesus.

As baptized followers of Jesus, we continue to face sin, temptation, suffering, and death. However, in Jesus, we know that all of these can and will

**“The name *Jesus*
means ‘God saves.’”**

(USCC FOR ADULTS, p. 85)

be overcome. So we have no reason to fear. We are safe. We are saved. No doubt this is why the words *do not fear, fear not, be not afraid*, and other similar variations appear literally hundreds of times in the Bible. No doubt this is why Jesus’ first words to the apostles after his Resurrection were, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). They had nothing to fear.

This is the meaning of the song “We Shall Overcome,” a popular anthem of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This song is not the sentiments of one group of people threatening to overcome another group



“Wait! Wait! He doesn’t stay dead!”

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salvation through his Church. Remember, the Church is not an exclusive club. It is a living sign of the unity to which God calls all people.

✚ apostolic—Jesus founded the Church upon Peter and then commissioned the apostles to go forth and baptize all nations. Since that time, the Church has remained faithful to the teachings of the apostles. We continue to be an apostolic church because the bishops, who are the successors of the apostles, safeguard, clarify, and proclaim the teachings of the apostles. The pope (the bishop of Rome) and the bishops are assisted by priests and deacons. Together, they gather and commission a vast army of the baptized to faithfully transmit the teachings of the apostles, as though passing along a priceless family heirloom, from generation to generation.

So when we say that “I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,” we are saying that we believe in a church that is unified in the Trinity, has divine origins and guidance, is open to all people, and is faithful to the teachings of the apostles. Those are some pretty identifiable marks.

Models of Faith—Mary and the Saints

Human beings, like all living creatures, learn through imitation. It is no surprise, then, that as we seek to grow spiritually, we look to others: parents, godparents, sponsors, and others who, by example, show us how to follow Jesus. The Church also gives us role models, the saints, who have faithfully followed Jesus by living lives of holiness. By learning about the lives of the saints, we can learn how to respond to God’s call in our own lives.

Is There Salvation Outside of the Church?

What about Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and a myriad of other non-Catholics? Can any of these people receive salvation if they are “outside” of the Catholic Church? The Church says that these people can indeed be saved. In the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* #22, the Church teaches that every human person is saved by Jesus Christ in ways known only to God. This means that we believe that the Catholic Church is the means of salvation, but that in ways known only to God, non-Catholics who seek God with a sincere heart and try to do his will as they understand it, are in a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church, through which they can find salvation.

Three buddies died in a car crash and they went to heaven for an orientation. St. Peter asked them, "When you are in your casket and friends and family are mourning you, what would you like to hear them say about you?" The first guy said, "I would like to hear them say that I was a great doctor and a great family man." The second guy said, "I would like to hear that I was a wonderful husband and school teacher, who made a huge difference in the lives of children." The last guy replied, "I would like to hear them say, 'Look! He's moving!'"

Because of our belief in the immortality of the soul, we Catholics believe that we can and do remain in communication with deceased faithful followers of Christ through the *Communion of Saints*. The Communion of Saints is made up of not only canonized (official) saints, but of all those faithful followers of Jesus who have passed from this life to the next: parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, children, cousins, friends, neighbors, and so on. Through their prayers and intercession, we can be helped. By the same token, through our prayers, the souls in purgatory can find assistance. Like the cell phone company that assures its customers that they are backed by a network, we, too, are backed by a network of those who "have gone before us with the sign of faith." (Eucharistic Prayer I, *Roman Missal*) We are not alone in this universe—and you don't have to believe in aliens to say that.

Only one thing can keep people from being afraid of the God of judgment: an encounter with Jesus Christ, God's "human face."

BENEDICT XVI

The Sacraments of the Church

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* reminds us that when a parent hugs a child, the hug is a visible reality, while the love that the hug conveys is an invisible reality. In a similar way, the sacraments are visible realities—outward signs—that convey for us the invisible reality of God’s grace.

Years ago, the *Baltimore Catechism* defined the *sacraments* as “outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace.” Not a bad definition at

“When these sacramental signs are celebrated, they reveal and make present the reality they signify.”

(USCC FOR ADULTS, P. 169)

all. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gave us another definition of the sacraments, which says much the same thing, but with more words: “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1131).

“When parents hug their children, for example, the visible reality we see is the hug. The invisible reality the hug conveys is love.”

(USCC FOR ADULTS, P. 168)

WHAT DOES EFFICACIOUS MEAN?

We say that the sacraments are *efficacious* signs. Yikes! What does *efficacious* mean? Something is efficacious when it achieves an effect. For example, the words “I’m sorry” are efficacious—they achieve the effect of apologizing. So when we say that the sacraments are efficacious, it means that the signs, symbols, and rituals achieve the effect they represent. There’s no magic involved. The signs, symbols, and rituals do not instigate God’s action, but rather reveal and make present what God is doing in the lives of the people receiving that sacrament.

in awe of. In essence, a mystery is something that is revealed and yet remains hidden. Even though God has revealed himself to us throughout all of salvation history, culminating in the pinnacle of his revelation, Jesus Christ, God remains beyond our grasp. We can encounter God. We can know God. But we cannot solve God.

At Mass, just after the consecration, we are invited to proclaim the Mystery of Faith. If a mystery is something that we simply can't understand, then the priest is inviting us to proclaim what we don't understand! The fact is, we cannot solve the mystery of faith and we may not fully understand it, but we can *know* it. In the deepest fiber of our being, we can and do know the mystery of our faith: Jesus Christ died for us, is risen, and



"You could read all of these books and none of them would really answer you, but by the time you'd finish, you'd have learned to live with the question."

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A mystery is something that is revealed and yet remains hidden.

will come again. This is the essence of the central mystery of our faith: the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. The word *paschal* comes from the Greek word for Passover, when the Hebrew people were saved by the blood of the lamb. We, in turn, are saved

by the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus, who is our Passover, our Pasch—thus, paschal mystery. The mystery at the heart of our faith is that from death comes new life. We may not fully understand this. We cannot solve this. But we know this in our heart of hearts that from death comes new life. Death is not the end.

Learning a New Language—All Catholics Know Sign Language

I often ask Catholics if they know sign language and most respond by saying, "No." I then proceed to silently make the Sign of the Cross; to genuflect; to bow; to use my thumb to trace the cross on my forehead, lips, and chest; and to place my hands in the *orans position* (hands slightly extended with palms up). Folks quickly recognize what I am pointing out to them:

Chapter Nine

The Welding Process: Sacraments of Initiation

Welding is the process of joining metals by melting them and adding filler material to form a strong joint. I love watching welders in action. They look like astronauts, with their protective gear on and, once the sparks start flying, it becomes quite a spectacle. In the end, what you have is a bond that is forged. In the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist—a bond is forged between Jesus, the Church, and us.



I'm Melting!

In the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wicked Witch of the West meets her doom when doused with water. It seems she melts when hydrated. As she slowly disintegrates, she cries out, “I’m melting! I’m melting!” Poor thing.

We normally associate the word *melting* with ice or candle wax. In both of these examples, a solid is transformed to liquid. In the case of wax, a candle can be reformed and reshaped. This image has long been applied to the human heart.

“My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me” (Psalm 22:15).

The image suggests that the human heart—thought of in the ancient world, as the center of one’s emotions, thoughts, and knowledge—can be reformed

**“The sacraments of initiation—
Baptism, Confirmation, and the
Eucharist—are the foundations
of the Christian life.”**

(USCC FOR ADULTS, P. 183)

however, is not a product. It's an embrace. Not a momentary embrace, but a lifelong one. Through our reception of the Eucharist, we are embraced by God, who heals and satisfies our inner ache.

At the same time, our reception of the Eucharist is an embrace, not only of God, but of our neighbors, as well. The Eucharist is not a "me and God" experience. To share a table is to enter into relationship with others. Likewise, we don't normally drink from the same cup that someone else is drinking from, unless we have an intimate relationship with that person. So we are, in a sense, becoming intimate with those who share the cup of communion. Our communion with God is thus fulfilled by loving our brothers and sisters. Communion compels us to recognize the presence of God not only in the bread and wine but also in the flesh of those we will encounter each and every day. Our worship of God, through the celebration of the Eucharist, is meaningless unless it points us in the direction of our neighbors.

"You wish to honor the body of the Savior? The same one who said: This is my body also said: You saw I was hungry and you didn't give me to eat. What you did not do to one of the least, you refused to me! So honor Christ by sharing your possessions with the poor."

(ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, HOMILY
50 ON MATTHEW)

The Mass

Catholics celebrate the Eucharist at Mass, the source and summit of our lives. As a ritual celebration, the Mass follows a particular pattern consisting of the following parts.

✚ **Introductory Rites:** The Mass begins with introductory rites that help us prepare to hear God's Word and to receive Jesus in Holy Communion.

Entrance Chant: The opening procession, led by our symbol of victory (the cross) and accompanied by joyful singing, represents our movement toward the altar of God.

Penitential Act: This rite includes a prayer of sorrow for sins and a petition for mercy (Lord Have Mercy, or Kyrie).

Gloria: A hymn of praise, which is omitted during Advent and Lent.

Collect Prayer: This prayer expresses our reason for coming together to celebrate and asks God for his grace.

- **The Liturgy of the Word:** We hear the story of God's plan for salvation, in the readings from the Old and New Testaments, arranged in a book called the Lectionary.

First Reading: generally from the Old Testament

Responsorial Psalm: from the Book of Psalms

Second Reading: generally from one of the New Testament Letters

Gospel Reading: a proclamation of the Good News of Jesus from one of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John)

Homily: the priest or deacon helps us understand our lives in relation to God's Word

Profession of Faith: we express our faith and trust in God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in the Church

Prayer of the Faithful: we confidently offer prayers for our needs and the needs of the world.

- **The Liturgy of the Eucharist:** We gather around the altar of sacrifice, to prepare to share in the sacred meal of the Eucharist.

Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts: A chalice (for the wine) and the paten (for the bread) are placed on the altar as the assembly practices stewardship through the collection. Members of the assembly carry bread and wine to the altar.

Prayer over the Offerings: During this prayer, the priest prays that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God.

Eucharistic Prayer: This prayer begins with the Preface—a song of praise to God—and the Holy, Holy, Holy (*Sanctus*), which is an Old Testament hymn of the angels. At the center of the Eucharistic Prayer is the consecration of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest holds up the host and chalice and sings a song of praise (a doxology) to the Trinity, to which the assembly responds with a resounding “Amen.”

- **Communion Rite:** The Communion Rite consists of the Lord's Prayer, the Sign of Peace, the Breaking of Bread or the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*), and the reception of Holy Communion. After a brief period of silence to give thanks, the Communion Rite ends with the Prayer after Communion.

What Is the Real Presence of Jesus?

To the Hebrew mind, a living being was not thought of as a person within a body; the body and the person were seen as one and the same. In other words, when Jesus offers us his body, he is offering us his being, his very personhood. Likewise, in Jewish thought, blood was believed to be the source of life. This is why the consumption of meat containing blood was prohibited—life is strictly God’s domain. When Jesus offers us his blood, he invites us to “consume” his very life. In essence, to receive the Eucharist is to consume the risen Christ and to be consumed into the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Our being and life come into communion with the risen Christ’s being and life. The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist means that we believe we are truly receiving the risen Christ’s actual being and life, not just fondly recalling them. We refer to the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ as *transubstantiation*.

✚ **Concluding Rites:** The Concluding Rites consist of announcements, the Final Blessing from the priest, and the Dismissal. It sends us forth on our mission as Christians.

So What?

What difference does it make that Catholics believe in and celebrate the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist? It means that we can be reformed. In celebrating the sacraments of initiation, we are reformed into followers of Jesus Christ. We are forged into union with Jesus and the Church. Through baptism, our sins are forgiven, and through confirmation, we are shown the way to the kingdom by the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist—the real presence of Jesus in our lives—we find the nourishment that sustains us on this journey. The sacraments of initiation lay down for us the pattern of reforming our lives that we will follow the rest of our lives: dying to sin and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, rising to new life in Jesus Christ who sustains us. In the sacraments of initiation, our hearts melt like wax and are reformed and reshaped to conform to Jesus.

Scripture

"But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile." (MARK 7:20-23)

Prayer

I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.
Amen.

⊕ **For thine is the Kingdom**—We can find two versions of the Lord’s Prayer in the Gospels: the longer one in Matthew 6:9–13 and the shorter one in Luke 11:2–4. The version of the Our Father that most Christians are accustomed to is based on Matthew. Protestants, however, include the words “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.” These words, called the doxology, are not found in Luke’s version nor in the earliest versions of Matthew’s Gospel, and most Scripture scholars agree that these words are not part of Jesus’ prayer. However, later versions of Matthew’s Gospel included the doxology and it is included in the King James version of the Bible, which is the most common version used by Protestants. This explains why Protestants include the doxology when they recite the Lord’s Prayer. At Mass, Catholics pray the words of the doxology separate from the Our Father, only after the priest has offered the prayer, “Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, . . .”

**Prayer is not about
achieving our own will,
but is about aligning
ourselves with God’s will.**

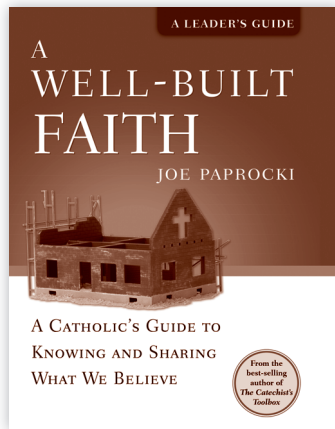
So What?

So, what difference does it make that Catholics pray the Lord’s Prayer? It means that we can pray to the One with whom we have an intimate relationship—God our Father. It means that we pray in the very words the Jesus himself gave us. It means that we pray with confidence, knowing that our prayers are heard, and that in praying these words, we can more closely align ourselves with God, in whose image we are made and whose presence we seek.

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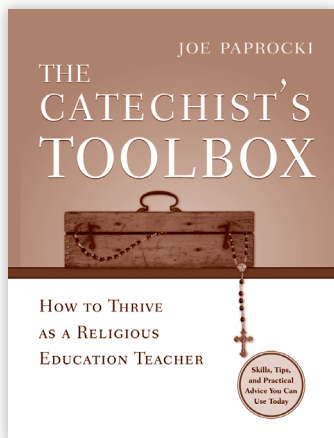
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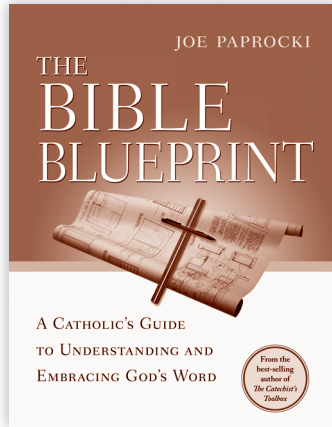
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It's pretty hard to build a house if you don't know how to read a blueprint. In the same way, it's difficult to develop your faith if you don't know how to read a Bible. In *The Bible Blueprint*, best-selling author and popular speaker Joe Paprocki cleverly uses a blueprint metaphor to help Catholics gain a solid understanding of the structure and organization of the Bible, and to help them build confidence in navigating its pages.

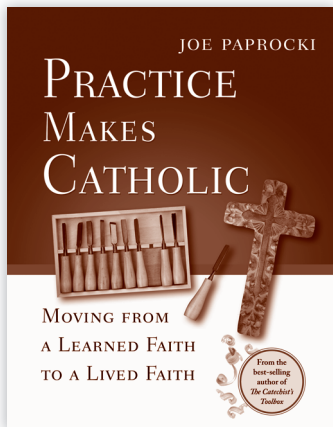
Among other topics, Paprocki covers the different genres of biblical writing, key figures in biblical history, and the methods Catholics rely on to interpret the Bible. Readers are also shown how to consult commentaries, concordances, and other valuable tools of Bible study to deepen their understanding of God's Word. Witty cartoons, sidebars, and quizzes keep the tone fun and engaging; eight perforated Bible bookmarks are bound into the book.

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It is said that practice makes perfect, but what else does practice make? If you ask Joe Paprocki, he'll say that practice makes Catholic—that is, there are certain distinct practices that make us essentially Catholic. The problem is that many Catholics don't understand—or perhaps misunderstand—why we engage in the many practices we do.

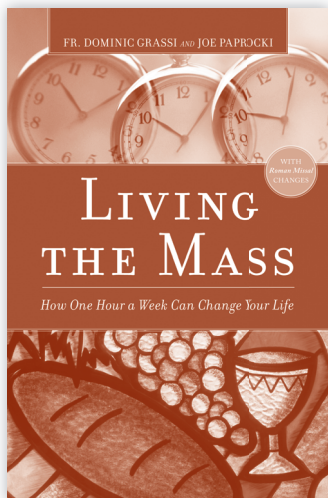
In *Practice Makes Catholic*, Paprocki addresses the all-important “why” of many Catholic practices by articulating five key characteristics that form our Catholic identity: a sense of sacramentality, a commitment to community, a respect for the dignity of human life and commitment to justice, a reverence for Tradition, and a disposition to faith and hope rather than despair. Under each of these categories, he explores and explains multiple Catholic practices, then describes how following each one can make a profound difference in our faith and in our lives.

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