

ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH YOU MIGHT REMEMBER

The Ten Commandments

The "Ten Commandments" sometimes called the Decalogue or Ten Words comes from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. There are two different versions of the commandments and they are recorded in two different biblical books (Exodus 20:1-17 & Deuteronomy 5:6-21). Each text is slightly different.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published by the Catholic Church in 1994, lists the following Traditional Catechetical Formula:

1. I am the Lord your God: you shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.
4. Honour your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

The Church, in faithfulness to Scripture and the example of Christ, acknowledges the importance of the Ten Commandments and Christians are obliged to keep them.¹

Five Precepts of the Church

The five precepts are a set of five laws that have been designed to nourish the moral and liturgical life in the Church. The moral and liturgical life of the Church refers to the common beliefs and public practices of worship of the faithful. These laws are meant to identify the minimum spiritual commitment required of the faithful.

¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, St Pauls, Homebush 1994 # 2068

The five precepts of the Church are

- 1) to attend Mass on Sunday and other holy days of obligation and to refrain from work and activities, which could impede the sanctification of those days;
- 2) to confess one's sins, receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year;
- 3) to receive the sacrament of Eucharist at least during the Easter season;
- 4) to abstain from eating meat and to observe the days of fasting established by the Church and
- 5) to help to provide for the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.²

The source of the five Precepts of the Church quoted above is the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994). These are again repeated in the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2005).

In Australia, the days for abstaining from meat and fasting are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On the Fridays of the year we are encouraged to do something extra by way of prayer or good works.

You might remember a 6th precept, that is: "To observe the Laws of the Church regarding Marriage."

It seems that the number of Precepts (otherwise known as the Laws of the Church) has always varied from one region to another throughout history.

The precept pertaining to marriage has not been removed as part of the obligation of Catholics, but is covered in both the Ten Commandments and in Canon Law (the Church's internal law)

Expectation that children attend Catholic school

Parents have the first responsibility for educating their children in terms of their faith and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. Pope John Paul II

² See *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* St Pauls, Homebush, 2005 # 431-2

referred to the family as the “domestic church” because it is within the family that we first form attitudes towards love, life, God and his Church.

The Church has established Catholic schools to assist parents in exercising this responsibility.

As partners in Catholic education, the Church is committed to developing authentic Catholic schools which:

- are founded on Jesus Christ and the message of the Gospel;
- impart the importance of faith to life and contemporary culture;
- create a community of believers, and share in the evangelising mission of the Church³; and
- are committed to the development of the whole person.⁴

While the Church supports Catholic families sending their children to Catholic schools the family has the choice for their children’s education.

In many regions of Australia religious education and formation is provided for Catholic students in public schools by catechists from the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD). This is an important work of the Church in education. In some regions, there are not enough places in Catholic schools for all Catholic families, and in other regions economic considerations mean that Catholic families need to send their children to public schools.

Don’t enter Protestant churches

In the past there were restrictions on Catholics entering Protestant churches. It was thought that to do so might be seen as compromising one’s own Catholic faith

These rules no longer apply in the line with the ecumenical spirit of Vatican II. There is nothing prohibiting a Catholic from entering a Protestant church. In fact, things have moved so much that a Baptism conducted in many Protestant churches is recognised as a valid sacrament within the Catholic Church. Sharing

³ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 2252

⁴ Adapted from Catholic Education Office, Sydney Vision Statement 2007 CEO Leichhardt.

the Eucharist is not yet possible since the Eucharist is a sign of unity which has not yet been achieved. In ordinary circumstances therefore a Catholic would not receive communion in a non-Catholic church just as a non-Catholic would not receive communion in a Catholic Church.

Birth Control

The issue of birth control has been a source of sometimes destructive discussion and debate in the Church. In the past there were accusations made by some that the Church has a negative attitude towards human sexuality. These accusations were sometimes accompanied by exaggerated claims of the benefits of sex without limits.

There have been extraordinary advancements in our understanding of human sexuality since the somewhat heady days of the 1960's when Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the Church's traditional understanding with regard to birth control. Pope John Paul II (Pope from 1978-2005) spoke and wrote extensively on this topic, and his writing are sometimes referred to as the Theology of the Body.

Main points of the Theology of the Body include:

- Man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27), are equal in dignity and worth;
- The idea that human relationships are a reflection of God himself;
- That we reach perfection through relationships;
- That sexual union consummates the marriage bond - seals it and perfects it;
- That sex should bring us into a true and lasting communion with God;
- Sex is the visible sign of the Sacrament of Marriage;
- Each time a couple makes love they renew their marital vows; sex consummates the relationship;
- Sex is both unitive - it brings husband and wife closer together, and procreative - love-making is open to the possibility of new life. Contraception destroys this unity.
- Sex is "sacred" and belongs "within" marriage; and
- When a couple understands the meaning behind sex and live by it they are "acting as ministers of God's plan" and they benefit from their

sexuality according to the original dynamism of 'total self-giving', without manipulation or alternation.

It is within this context that Natural Family Planning is proposed as the most life-giving method of exercising the responsibility of planning a family.⁵

(For more information on this topic also see Question 13 in *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* Bishops' Committee for Family and Life Secretariat. This little booklet is available for purchase through the National Office for Evangelisation)

In Vitro Fertilization

(To be added)

Women stay off the altar

Up until around the 1960's, only men were permitted in the sanctuary of the Church - the area around the altar. This included ordained men, altar boys, cantors and members of choirs.

Through research and study into the earliest practices of Catholic worship and its development, the Church came to an understanding that women should not be forbidden to enter the sanctuary.

In many parishes throughout Australia both men and women are actively involved as Lectors, Cantors, Commentators and special Eucharistic Ministers during Mass. In some rural parishes appropriately trained men and women lead the occasional Sunday prayer service when a priest is not available to say Mass.

⁵ Notes drawn from data provided by Evelyn Brien Natural Fertility Services, Centacare Sydney, August 2007. For more information of this topic see *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, John Paul II, Pauline Books & Media, 2006. For an introduction into this line of thought see *Theology of the Body Made Simple*, Fr Anthony Percy, Connor Court Publishing, Bacchus Marsh, 2005.

The Bible

Once only read by priests, theologians the Bible now has a central place in Catholicism as a source of prayer, teaching and inspiration for all Catholics. Because of the attitude that the Protestants took to the Scripture after the Reformation, a misguided attitude developed among Catholics that was suspicious of Scripture reading. The Second Vatican Council repudiated this attitude. There is now a growing interest amongst Catholics in studying scripture and using the Bible as a source of prayer, either alone or in small groups.

Bible study groups, Lenten groups and prayer groups are some examples of small groups who meet to discuss scripture. In the modern electronic age there are also websites that offer daily scripture reflections.⁶

Frequent confession

In earlier times there may have been a obsessive concern with sin which led some people to feel the need to go to Confession very frequently. While the obsessive concern with sin has thankfully abated sin is still very much part of our common human experience.

There are some who see the pendulum has swung so far the other way that there is no need for a person to confess their sins sacramentally. But Confession (now often called the Sacrament of Reconciliation) is still an important part of Catholic life.

If a person has not been to confession for many years it is important that they know they are very welcome at any time. It doesn't matter if it has been 10, 20 or years or even longer.

If a person is coming back to the Sacrament after a long break, it might be easier in terms of anonymity to seek the sacrament in a Church which still has a screen between the priest and confessor. In the major cities, inner city churches often have these facilities.

⁶ One example is Daily Prayer Online, available at <http://churchresources.info/pray/gospel.php>

Frequent communion

The Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion every time they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist; she obliges them to do so at least once a year.⁷

Holy Communion achieves in our spiritual life what material food produce in our bodily life.⁸ Christ is present in the Eucharist in a unique way. “In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist “the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.*”⁹ Growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to us as food for the journey to heaven.¹⁰

The faithful are also now encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds, the body and the blood. Some parishes offer this only during weekday Masses, some offer it at Sunday Masses, and others parishes offer it only on special occasions like Easter and Christmas.

Church every Sunday

The ancient teaching, with its foundation in the practice of the Apostles states that the faithful should participate in the Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation. This has not changed. The early Christian practice of the Sunday beginning after sun goes down on the Saturday has been rediscovered, allowing for the Sunday obligation to attend Mass to be met on Saturday evening as well as on Sunday.¹¹

⁷ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1417

⁸ Decree On The Ministry And Life Of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* Documents of the Vatican Council. par 5 http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html

⁹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1374

¹⁰ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1392

¹¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2192

Indulgences

Indulgences are particular expressions of the mercy of God, and are linked to the effects of the Sacrament of Penance.

Indulgences are the remission of the temporal punishment due for sins committed. Plenary indulgences are the remission of all punishment. Indulgences can also be applied to the souls of the faithful in purgatory.

The Church, as the minister of Christ's redemption, dispenses graces - including indulgences - from the treasury of the gifts given by Christ, through his death and resurrection, and makes them available to those seeking them with sincere heart. Indulgences are not magical, like all graces they require the proper disposition to receive them. They certainly cannot be sold.

Like all gifts, material or spiritual, given by God, they are to be shared for the building of the body of Christ, whether on Earth, in purification on the way to Heaven, or in eternal happiness.

The normal requirements set by the church for all plenary indulgences include the person going to confession within a reasonably short period of time, receiving the Eucharist and praying for the intentions of the pope, all in a spirit of total detachment from the attraction of sin.

In recent times there have been Special indulgences announced for the 150th Anniversary of the Apparitions at Lourdes and for World Youth Day 2008.

More information on indulgences can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1471-1479).

Fast and abstinence

The following paragraph is from the Lenten Penance instructions sent to parishes each year by the diocesan bishop:

The Church's Canon Law reaffirms our obligation to do penance. The special times of penance are all Fridays throughout the year and the

season of Lent. We recall that St. John the Baptist prepared for the coming of the Lord by “preaching a baptism of repentance”. Christ began his ministry on earth with the exhortation to repent: “Repent and believe the Gospel” Mk 1:15.

Repentance means the rejection of sin. It implies conversion to, and reconciliation with God. Penance is the concrete expression of repentance. It takes the forms of prayer, self-denial, and works of charity. Each of these identifies us more closely with our Saviour. By penance we make satisfaction for our sins, and take real steps in the renewal of our lives. Penance is the proof of our repentance. Repentance and conversion are central, on-going features of Christian living. Penance has to be a constant, even daily, practice in our lives. In nominating special times of penance, the Church encourages and promotes in all of us the *habit* of penance.

Furthermore, observance of these special times by all Catholics throughout the universal Church emphasises what we call “the social dimension of sin”. The sin of the individual member always in some measure infects the whole body. Therefore during Lent and on the Fridays of the year, we do penance, not only on our own account, but also in the name of the Church and of the world. We must take very seriously our penitential obligations and be sure to carry them out. The Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference has not restricted our penance to fast and abstinence in all cases, it has left room for our own responsible choice. Where we make the choice, we should carefully select the form of penance that we consider most appropriate for our own circumstances and growth in the Christian life.

Thus it is only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday that the Church asks us to observe abstinence from meat and fasting.

For Christians, fasting is but one of the ways of expressing penance. The other ways are prayer and almsgiving. We are encouraged by the Church to observe all of these during Lent.

The practice of fasting is given to us by the Church to help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart. (Catechism, #2043)

Mixed Marriages

In the past there were restrictions on Catholics entering marrying Protestants or people of other religious affiliations. Now it is understood that for a Catholic validly to marry a non-Catholic they must receive a dispensation from the Church.

There are two types of mixed marriages: between a Catholic and a non-Christian or between a Catholic and a non-Catholic Christian. While the Church rules differ slightly for each case, it is essential that the spouses accept that the marriage is for life, it is exclusive and that it is open to procreation. It is also necessary for the Catholic party to persevere in the faith and to indicate that they will do their best to have their children baptised and be given a Catholic upbringing. The non-Catholic party must be advised of this expectation with regard to children.¹²

(For more information on this topic see Question 10 in *Marriage in the Catholic Church: Frequently Asked Questions* Bishops' Committee for Family and Life Secretariat. This little booklet is available for purchase through the National Office for Evangelisation).

Some Excommunications

Excommunication is the most severe Church penalty, reserved for certain particularly grave sins. Excommunication impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain Church acts. Therefore, absolution consequently cannot be granted, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place or priests authorized by them. However, in danger of death any priest, even if deprived of faculties for hearing confessions, can absolve from every sin and excommunication.¹³

Latin Mass

¹² See *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* #345, St Pauls, Strathfield 2006

¹³ See Catechism of the Catholic Church #1463

Until 1968 all Masses were in Latin. For about 40 years following the Second Vatican Council (1965-1968), where it was decreed that the Mass could be celebrated in the language of the community, the Latin Mass was only rarely celebrated.

In July 2007 Pope Benedict XVI announced that “In parishes where there is a stable group of faithful who adhere to the earlier liturgical tradition, the pastor should willingly accept their request to celebrate the mass according to the rite of the Roman Missal published in 1962”.¹⁴ The Pope further indicated that the ordinary form of the Mass is the liturgy that has been used since Vatican II where it is celebrated in the language of the community. Pope Benedict XVI thus went to some lengths to ensure that there are two versions of the one Rite not “two Rites”.

In Australia the mass is commonly said in English, with the large number of ethnic communities using their community’s language.

The celebration of the Latin Mass is currently celebrated in only a small number of centres. In Australia in 2007, Catholics attending the 1962 Latin Rite accounted for around 1800 people or 0.2% of Catholics who regularly attend Mass on Sundays.

Women cover heads in church

The practice of women covering their heads in Church and men not wearing hats appears to have come from St Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians:

“However what I want you to understand is that Christ is the head of every man and man is the head of woman and God is the head of Christ. For a man to pray or prophesy with his head covered is a sign of disrespect to his head. For a woman, however, it is a sign of disrespect to her head if she prays or prophesies unveiled.” 1 Cor. 11:4-5

In the past this scripture passage was mistakenly interpreted as indicating the superiority of men over women. The practice of covering and not covering of

¹⁴ Benedict XVI *On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the reform of 1970*.
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070707_lettera-vescovi_en.html

one's head in first century Mediterranean culture and religion was related to a whole series of socially and historically specific symbolic meanings concerned with clearly differentiating males and females, in this case in the Christian community in Corinth. It seems that some men had long hair and some women cut their hair short and both of these practices caused an offence in the community.

Informed by a more accurate understanding of this scripture passage, the Church recognises that obligation for women and prohibition for men with regard to covering their heads in Church was not founded in scripture and accordingly the practice fell away.

It is important, however, for both men and women to dress appropriately for Mass. While the days of arriving at Mass in the "Sunday best" seem to have largely disappeared, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has the following: "To prepare for worthy reception of this sacrament, the faithful should observe the fast required in their Church. Bodily demeanours (gestures, clothing) ought to convey the respect, solemnity, and joy of this moment when Christ becomes our guest."¹⁵

Medals and Statues

While homes do not necessarily have images and statues as they once had, their usefulness has not diminished.

Medals and statues are both examples of a sacramental: that is a grace-bearing sign which does not fully express the nature of the Church as a Sacrament but does bring to mind the reality that it signifies. Medals and statues can be sources of hope and inspiration but, in and of themselves, they do not carry the guarantee of grace associated with the seven Sacraments.¹⁶

PRAYER

Rosary

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1387

¹⁶ See Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* Harper San Francisco, San Francisco 1994 p.1250

The Rosary remains a popular prayer in Catholicism. The Rosary, or Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is one of the most excellent prayers to the Mother of God who can intercede before God for us.

Popes have repeatedly exhorted the faithful to the frequent recitation of this biblically inspired prayer which is centred on contemplation of the saving events of Christ's life, and their close association with his Virgin Mother.

The value and efficacy of this prayer have often been attested by saintly bishops and those advanced in holiness of life.¹⁷

The Rosary is essentially a contemplative prayer, which requires "tranquillity of rhythm or even a mental lingering which encourages the faithful to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life."

In 2002 Pope John Paul II added a fourth set of "mysteries", the Luminous Mysteries, to the traditional Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary. Along with the Crucifix, Rosary beads remain one of the distinctive symbols of Catholicism.

(For more details on the "mysteries" see the National Office for Evangelisation website. (<http://www.evangeliseaustralia.com>))

Forty hours devotions

The Forty Hours Devotion is a special forty-hour period of continuous prayer made before the Blessed Sacrament, which is the true presence of Christ, in solemn exposition. With increased demands on people's time in terms of work and family in recent years this practice has waned.

But among the young there is renewed attention to Holy Hours or Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In light of World Youth Day parishes and schools across Australia are encouraging Eucharistic devotion among the young. For many young people, this is a new form of devotion.

¹⁷ *Directory On Popular Piety And The Liturgy : Principles and Guidelines* #197 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. Vatican City 2001.

When the faithful adore Christ present in the Sacrament, it should always be acknowledged that this presence is directed toward both sacramental and spiritual Communion in the celebration of the Eucharist. This devotion draws the faithful into an ever deeper participation in the Paschal Mystery.

All people of faith are encouraged to worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, in harmony with their way of life.¹⁸

First Fridays

The practice of attending Mass on the first Friday of each month stems from the appearance of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary in France in the 17th century, where he asked that she receive Him in Holy Communion on the first Friday of every month. At that time sacramental communion was very rare among the faithful and the First Friday devotion contributed significantly to a renewed use of the Sacraments of Penance and Eucharist.

In our own time, with a re-emphasis on Sunday as the most important feast each week, this devotional practice has waned. Attendance at weekday Mass is still encouraged and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is still active amongst the faithful, including what is sometimes called “Heart Spirituality”. In Australia the *Missionaries of the Sacred Heart*, along with other “Sacred Heart” orders, are the major promoters of this form of prayer, understanding and devotion.

Stations of the Cross

The *Stations of the Cross* is a synthesis of various devotions that have arisen since the high Middle Ages:

- the pilgrimage to the Holy Land during which the faithful devoutly visit the places associated with the Lord’s Passion;
- devotion to the three falls of Christ under the weight of the Cross;
- devotion to “the suffering journey of Christ” which consisted of processing from one church to another in memory of Christ’s Passion;

¹⁸ See *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship* (Eucharisticum Mysterium) #50 Sacred Congregation of Rites, 1967

- devotion to the stations of Christ, those places where Christ stopped on his journey to Calvary because he was obliged to do so by his executioner, exhausted by fatigue, or because he was moved by compassion to speak to someone.

The present form of fourteen stations has existed since the middle of the 17th century. Alternative forms of the Stations of the Cross have been approved by the Holy See,¹⁹ or publicly used by the Pope²⁰: these can be regarded as genuine forms of the devotion and may be used as occasion might warrant.

In the Stations of the Cross, various strands of Christian piety come together:

- the idea of life being a journey or pilgrimage;
- as a passage from earthly exile to our true home in Heaven;
- the deep desire to be conformed to the Passion of Christ;
- the demands of following Christ, which imply that his disciples must follow behind the Master, daily carrying their own crosses (cf Lk 9, 23);
- as the occasion warrants, one of the traditional stations might possibly be substituted with a reflection on some other aspects of the Gospel account of the journey to Calvary, which are traditionally included in the Stations of the Cross;

Although this practice is not as popular as it once was as an individual devotion, the Stations of the Cross is still an important form of individual and communal prayer. In many parishes the *Stations* are walked together on the morning of Good Friday.

Benediction

The word “benediction” comes from the Latin “*benedicto*” meaning “blessing”. In the Catholic Church, it has come to mean the rite in which the people are blessed with a consecrated host after a period of “exposition”, the exhibiting of the host for public veneration.

¹⁹ Such is true of the “Via Crucis” in the *Libro del Pellegrino* prepared by the Central Committee for the celebration of the Holy Year of 1975

²⁰ Such as the texts used by Pope John Paul II for the “Via Crucis” at the Colosseum in 1991, 1992, and 1994

The rite appeared first in Belgium in the 13th century where, along with the feast of Corpus Christi, it arose in response to controversies regarding the presence of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine. Devotion to the reserved Sacrament grew throughout the whole Church as a result of Reformation questioning of certain Eucharistic practices. In part, its popularity was a response to the distancing of people from the action of the Mass because of language and other barriers.²¹

Current norms concerning the reserved Sacrament emphasise that devotions are to be related to the celebration of the Mass.²²

Exposition and Benediction has been a feature of prayer during *World Youth Day* events around the world.

Novenas

The word novena is the feminine form of the mediaeval Latin word, “novenus”, or “ninth”. In the Church, a novena is a devotion consisting of prayer for nine straight days, in which the faithful ask God for special graces. These prayers may be simply a recitation of the Rosary or small prayers throughout the day.

The practice of saying novenas is derived from Scripture. After Jesus’ Ascension into heaven, he told his disciples to pray together and devote themselves to constant prayer (Acts 1:14). The Apostles, Blessed Virgin Mary, and other followers of Jesus prayed together for nine consecutive days leading up to Pentecost.²³

²¹ See Elizabeth Harrington *Liturgy Lines* “Benediction” 20/01/2002
http://www.litcom.net.au/liturgy_lines/displayarticle.php?llid=141

²² See *Eucharistiae Sacramentum* #85 Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship 1973

²³ See “Novenas” *Roman Catholic Prayers* <http://www.roman-catholic-prayers.com/novena.html?gclid=CJnh37-kII4CFReEhgodiafRPA>