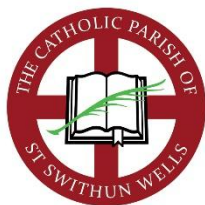


# ESSENTIAL CATECHISM





# GOD AND I

## 1. Does God exist?

Everything we see in the universe has a cause, a reason it exist. I exist because my parents gave life to me. The rocky cliffs on the coast exist because of movements in the earth's crust over millions of years that caused the land to be raised higher than the sea. For each thing we see around us, there must be something else that gave rise to it. The universe (the totality of things and beings existing in space and time) also exist.

Hence *there must necessarily be something that is the cause/reason for the existence of the universe*. It would be totally illogical to assume that the mouse, the ocean, and the stars all have a cause for their existence but that the universe does not. Even the universe as a whole cannot exist "without cause".

The cause or reason for the universe as a whole must, however, be greater than, and above all entirely different from, the universe itself and everything within it. What has brought forth both space and time cannot itself be a part of space and time.

This "something" that is greater than everything in the world and that must necessarily exist, since otherwise the universe itself would be without cause, we call GOD.

## 2. Who is God?

Try for a moment to imagine "nothing"—in other words, absolute nothingness, not even a kind of darkness or a great emptiness—no: really, absolutely, nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing! Not even thinking. Simply nothing. Bet you don't succeed! Why is there anything at all, and not simply nothing?

But in fact there is something. We know this with absolute certainty.

And even if there were only a single tiny grain of sand and nothing else—even that would be an incredible miracle. For one single tiny grain of sand alone would destroy "nothingness". There must be someone there who has uttered his great "Yes" to everything that exists, who has willed that "something" should exist and not "nothing" instead.

We Christians call this "Someone", who has created the universe out of nothing, God. And we say that *God is the CREATOR of the world*.

### 3. Who am I?

There is a restlessness that rises within us, or sometimes an inexplicable sadness. Some people describe this feeling with words like: "*I'm in search for a deep joy, but I can't find it*". "There is an insatiable longing within me, like a great, deep chasm that nothing will fill". "I can't find peace within myself!".

You don't need to be troubled by the fact that your heart is so big, so full of longing, so restless. There is a reason for this. All of our striving for truth and happiness is ultimately a search for the one who supports us *absolutely*, satisfies us *absolutely*, and employs us *absolutely* in his service. St. Augustine says, "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." God has placed in our hearts this longing so that we can seek and find Him. He wants to fill us, right down to the last fibre of our being – not with some kind of anonymous energy, but with himself.

### 4. For what purpose am I here on earth?

We are here on earth in order to *know, to love and to serve God*. St Augustine says: "The only one who can make man happy is the One who created him".

### 5. How can we actually know anything at all about God?

In order to know the fact of God's existence, our little grey brain cells are enough. To know that God must exist, one does not need much more than a logical mind. Who is this God, then? What is his relationship toward what he has created? What is God himself like? Is God perhaps cold and cruel? Is he without feelings, like a machine? Or is he perhaps full of love?

Of himself, man can give no answer to these questions. Not even the greatest philosophers and thinkers can do so. And anyone who claims to be able to know what God himself is like is either nuts or a fraud. What? So do we humans have no chance of knowing whether the ultimate cause of the universe is good or evil? Whether we can trust in the Creator of the world because he is good? Or whether we have been thrust into this world by a cruel tyrant, who simply toys with us, only to utterly annihilate us tomorrow or the day after?

In His goodness and wisdom *God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by sending us His Son, Jesus Christ*, so that we might find the way home. He is "the way, and the truth, and the life".

# JESUS CHRIST

## 1. What is the original sin?

Every one of us has some kind of fault or defect in our character. Some people see it sooner, others later. Sometimes we get mad at ourselves: "I wanted to do it so well! But now I've gone and done the exact opposite. What a fool I am!". In thinking about this kind of experience, Christians speak of "original sin": we all seek what is good, but somehow we are under some kind of compulsion. It is as though someone is telling us to do the exact opposite. And this happens again and again; again and again and again. Nothing seems to help – no good upbringing, no amount of persuasion, no psychology. The world is broken. We no longer live in a paradise.

To sin is to destroy God's gifts, described by the ten commandments: the gift of God himself, the gift of his name, the gift of true rest and freedom, the relationship with our parents and with others, the gift of our life and our body, the gift of truth.

## 2. Why did Jesus come?

Jesus came to reopen to us the closed gates of paradise by restoring our rightful connection with God the Father. Those who enjoy his friendship have their spiritual senses—mind and heart—reopened, enabling them to perceive every relationship and aspect of existence as a sign of the Father's love for us.

## 3. Who was Jesus?

Jesus came in the world as a crying baby. A baby nursed at his mother's breast, a child, tearing down the road, skinning his knees, playing and running. A young man, proud of his growing strength and understanding, sharing his joys and sorrows with his friends, both boys and girls, experiencing temptations just as we do... and yet coming to understand ever more deeply that despite everything he is not of this world because, in a profound and unique way, he is still united with his Father in heaven. His first friends (the disciples) saw a real human being, with whom they could laugh, cry, eat, drink, sing, pray, have fun. But they also saw someone who could work miracles and even raise dead to life. They sensed a superhuman power in his words: he got them, he knew their hearts better than anyone else. They also

witnessed that death and fear had no power over him. The story of his friendship with Lazarus is a good example. The Bible does not tell us in detail about their friendship, but clearly they were often together and enjoyed each other's company, whether walking in the hills or sitting together talking by the shores of the Sea of Galilee. One day Lazarus died and we know from the gospel of John that Jesus wept for him. But we also know that eventually he performed an astonishing miracle: raised him to life.

Around the year 30 A.D., under Pontius Pilate, Jesus was brutally executed on the Cross, and his death was unequivocally witnessed. But after his death, he was seen alive by many people, even, on one occasion, by more than five hundred brethren at one time. From this short summary of his life, we can see that Jesus was both true God and true man.

#### **4. Why did Jesus die and rise again?**

Everyone possesses the innate need to both love and be loved. Death represents everything that goes against this need. It is the absence of relationships and love. When a friend or relative passes away, we mourn because we feel isolated and forsaken, recognizing on a fundamental level that we were not created for this solitude. Death is also what we experience when we break significant relationships due to our thoughts, words and deeds.

Through his own death, Jesus descended into the depths of our loneliness, the agony of our separation from God, our grief, our suffering, our tears, and our despair. Yet, he did not abandon us there. He extended his hand, and those who embraced him he lifted them up with him. He conquered death. He conquered solitude.

#### **5. Are there proofs for the existence of Jesus, his death and resurrection?**

We have several proofs of the existence of Jesus: the Gospels and the books of the New Testament, but also many non Christians witnessed his existence and especially his death on the Cross. There are no proofs of his Resurrection in the scientific sense. There are, however, very strong individual and collective testimonies by a large number of contemporaries who saw him after his resurrection, talked and even had breakfast with Him.

# THE CHURCH

## **1. What does Jesus' Resurrection have to do with us?**

Think for a moment about someone, perhaps one of your relatives, whom you knew and who has since died. Do you believe that this dear person is totally gone forever? As though he had never existed? Do you believe that a good God could ever forget him? Can you imagine this person having a new life - in a new reality with God? Many people cherish the hope that God does not simply wipe us away from the face of the earth. That this is true, that although we die, we will yet find new life is something we know ever since Jesus died and rose again. With his Resurrection Jesus opened to us the way to live forever with Him. If we decide to belong to Him, we share his victory over death and sin.

## **2. What does Jesus' Ascension into Heaven have to do with us?**

Let's try to make sense of all of this. After his resurrection, Jesus's friends saw him for another 40 days. Then he returned to his Father. The bible tells it like this: a cloud took him away and hid him from their sight and he was taken up to Heaven to sit at the right hand of his Father. That does not mean that Jesus simply disappeared or took a journey into space. He didn't go "elsewhere", but he joined his Father at the heart of the universe. He didn't leave our world. He went in the deep of our world, at the root of our world. Heaven is not a place beyond the stars, but something much greater: it is the heart of creation, the place where God and man become one. In this sense "ascension into Heaven" can be something that takes place in our everyday lives every time we deepen our friendship with Christ.

## **3. What does Pentecost have to do with us?**

Fifty days after his Resurrection the Lord sent the Holy Spirit down from Heaven upon his disciples. The age of the Church began. The Church does not live to compensate for the absence of Jesus who has "disappeared" but on the contrary finds the reason for her existence and mission in the invisible presence of Jesus, a presence working through the power of his Spirit. Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit the Church becomes the Body of Christ in history.

## **4. How is Christ present today in the Church?**

Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them".

In a nutshell: Christ is present today through his Body, a name that signifies both the Sacraments (especially Holy Communion) and the companionship of those who believe in Him.

## **5. What is the Holy Trinity and what does he have to do with us?**

Ever since Pentecost Christians have prayed to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. And they also baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". So does that mean we're now talking about three gods? No. Christians are not polytheists (people who believe in many gods). After long wrestling with this problem, the early Church finally came up with the formula: "One God in three Persons". We call this the Trinity. Through Jesus the Church has learned that within the deepest reality of this one God there is a community, an exchange, mutual love between three distinct persons.

God does not live in splendid solitude but rather is an inexhaustible source of life that is ceaselessly given and communicated. To a certain extent we can perceive this by observing both the macro-universe: our earth, the planets, the stars, the galaxies; and the micro-universe: cells, atoms, elementary particles. The "name" of the Blessed Trinity is, in a certain sense, imprinted upon all things because all that exists, down to the last particle, is in relation; in this way we catch a glimpse of God as relationship and ultimately, Creator Love.

The strongest proof that we are made in the image of the Trinity is this: love alone makes us happy because we live in a relationship, and we live to love and to be loved. Borrowing an analogy from biology, we could say that imprinted upon his "genome", the human being bears a profound mark of the Trinity, of God as Love. To help us learn to love and thus to realize ourselves, God has given us the Church, the place where the love of the Trinity especially dwells.



# SACRAMENTS

## **1. What is a Sacrament and how many are there?**

Sacraments are holy, visible signs instituted by Christ of an invisible reality, in which Christians can experience the healing, forgiving, nourishing, strengthening presence of God that enables them to love. This is possible because God's grace works in the sacraments. The Catholic Church has seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony.

## **2. Why do we need sacraments in the first place?**

We need the sacraments to become like Jesus through Jesus: children of God in freedom and Glory. In Baptism the fallen children of men become cherished children of God; through Confirmation the weak become strong; committed Christians; through Penance the guilty are reconciled; through the Eucharist Jesus is coming in us; through Matrimony and Holy Orders individualists become servants of love; through the Anointing of the Sick the despairing become people of confidence. In Christ, through the sacraments, we men, lost in selfishness, grow and mature into the true life that has no end.

## **3. Why is faith in Jesus Christ not enough? Why does God give us the sacraments, too?**

We can and should come to God with all our sense, not just with the intellect. That is why God gives himself to us in earthly signs – especially in bread and wine, the Body and Blood of Christ. People saw Jesus, heard him, could touch him and thereby experience salvation and healing in body and soul. The sensible signs of the sacraments show this same signature of God, who desires to address the whole man – not just his head.

## **4. Why do the sacraments belong to the Church? Why cannot anyone use them however he wants?**

Jesus entrusted his words and signs to specific men, namely, the apostles, who were to hand them on; he did not hand them over to an anonymous crowd. Sacraments exist *for* the Church and *through* the Church. They are *for*

her, because the Body of Christ, which is the Church, is established, nourished, and perfected through the sacraments. They exist *through* her, because the sacraments are the power of Christ's Body.

## **5. What sacraments can be received only once in a lifetime?**

Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Order. These Sacraments imprint an indelible mark on the soul of the Christian. Baptism and Confirmation make him once and for all a child of God and Christlike. Holy Orders similarly leaves an imprint on a Christian Man. Just as someone always is and remains a child of his parents (and not just "sometimes" or "a little bit"), do also through Baptism and Confirmation one becomes forever a child of God, Christlike, and a member of his Church. Similarly, Holy Orders is not a "job" that a man does until retirement; rather, it is an irrevocable charism (gift of grace). Because God is faithful, the effect of these sacraments is maintained forever for Christian – as receptivity to God's call, as a vocation and as protection. Consequently these sacraments cannot be repeated.

## **6. What is the Eucharist?**

The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament in which Jesus comes to us through the bread and wine, which become the Body and Blood of Jesus. In the Mass during the Consecration, the priest repeats exactly the words of Jesus during the Last Supper. Through the Holy Spirit, bread and wine become Jesus's Body and Jesus's Blood.

## **7. What I have to do when Jesus comes to me in Holy Mass?**

Before Communion: Tell Him how happy you are that He is coming to you. He chooses to be a piece of bread to melt in your mouth and to stay in your heart.

After Communion: Go back to your seat and kneel down. Stay with Him and thank Him. Talk with Him and ask Him to fulfil your desires.

## **THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

- |                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Wisdom        | 5. Knowledge        |
| 2. Understanding | 6. Piety            |
| 3. Counsel       | 7. Fear of the Lord |
| 4. Fortitude     |                     |