

Precepts of the Catholic Church

The *Precepts of the Catholic Church* are a description of the **absolute minimum** actions required of Catholics regarding the Church.

The Church uses these precepts remind us that Christian life requires a commitment to prayer and active participation in the liturgy and sacraments. If we fall below this bare-minimum level, we can't rightly consider ourselves to be in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Each of these precepts of the Catholic Church is a requirement. Together with the [Ten Commandments](#), they represent the minimum level of moral living. Intentional violation of the precepts or the Commandments is *grave matter*, meaning a [mortal sin](#).

The Precepts

1. *You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.*

We must "sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord" (Sunday), as well as the principal feast days, known as [Catholic holy days of obligation](#). This requires attending Mass, "and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days."

2. *You shall confess your sins at least once a year.*

We must prepare for the Eucharist by means of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). This sacrament "continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness."

3. *You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.*

This "guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy."

4. *You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.*

"The fourth precept ensures the times of ascesis and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart." See *below for more about fasting & abstinence*.

5. *You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.*

"The fifth precept means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability."

(These quotations are from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in its section about the [Precepts of the Catholic Church](#) (#2041-3).)

Note that these precepts of the Catholic Church are required, **unless** you have a legitimate reason for not meeting them. For example:

- If you are sick, tending to a sick child, or camping in the wilderness on Sunday and cannot get to Mass, it is not a grave violation to miss Mass that day.
- Children, the elderly, and pregnant or nursing women do not have to fast on normal fast days (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).

Go beyond the minimum!

Always remember: the precepts of the Catholic Church are *minimum* levels of participation in the life of the Church. Out of love for Christ and a desire to advance in the spiritual life, you will normally try to do far more than they require.

Many people **recommend** that Catholics:

- Attend Mass at least one *more* time a week. (Most Church parishes celebrate Mass every day of the year!)
- Go to confession at least once a month, and find a regular confessor so he can give you better guidance.
- Find a good *spiritual director* to give you sound guidance for growing in the spiritual life.
- Receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at every Mass, if you meet the guidelines for reception (are free from mortal sin, etc.).
- Make a habit of practicing penitential and charitable acts *beyond* those required by the precepts of the Catholic Church.
- Contribute as much as possible to the material needs of the Church and the needy.

<http://www.beginningcatholic.com/precepts-of-the-catholic-church.html>