

THE PRECEPTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

What are the precepts of the Church?

The precepts of the Church are the *minimum requirements* for living an authentic Catholic life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists five precepts (cf. nos. 2041-2043). I would like to comment on each one.

YOU SHALL ATTEND MASS ON SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION, AND REST FROM SERVILE LABOUR.

One day a week: it's the least we could do for a God who has given us so much. By "servile labour," the Church means any "work or business that would inhibit the worship to be given to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the due relaxation of mind and body" (Code of Canon Law, no. 1247). In other words, try to mow the lawn, clean the dishes, do the laundry, do your homework, etc. on Friday or Saturday, instead of on Sunday.

YOU SHALL CONFESS YOUR SINS AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR.

Mortal sins must be forgiven through the sacrament of Confession, and this must be done before one can receive the Eucharist. Of course, we are encouraged to confess our venial sins as well, and to go to Confession much more regularly than once a year. Pastors and spiritual directors usually advise going to Confession at least once a month, but you can go more often if necessary.

YOU SHALL RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST AT LEAST DURING THE EASTER SEASON.

There's no better time to receive the Eucharist than during the season in which we commemorate Jesus' offering of himself to the Father (and to us) for our salvation. Of course, we are encouraged to receive the Eucharist any time that we are properly disposed to receive it -- meaning, we have no mortal sin on our soul, we have observed the one-hour fast before Communion, and we believe that what we are receiving is truly Christ.

YOU SHALL OBSERVE THE DAYS OF FASTING AND ABSTINENCE ESTABLISHED BY THE CHURCH

All Fridays of the year are days of penance. However, only on Fridays in Lent are Catholics, aged 14 and older obliged to abstain from meat. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, moreover, Catholics aged 18 to 59 inclusive, are bound to fast, which means, at the least, having one full meal during that day and two smaller meals, with no snacking between.

YOU SHALL HELP TO PROVIDE FOR THE NEEDS OF THE CHURCH.

This is important so that the Church has available to it "those things which are necessary for divine worship, for apostolic and charitable work and for the worthy support of its ministers" (Code of Canon Law, no. 222).