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MARKS OF THE CHURCH

All of you are part of the same body. There is only one Spirit of God, just as you were given one hope when you were chosen to be God's people. We have only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. There is one God who is the Father of all people.
(Ephesians 4:4-6)

Read

When we say the Nicene Creed, we say that we believe in “one holy catholic and apostolic church.” These four characteristics are special signs called the **Marks of the Church**. The Marks of the Church are very important because they can only be found in the true Church of Jesus Christ.

The Church is *one*, because we believe in one God, one faith, and one baptism. The Holy Spirit brings us together as one group, God's people.

The Church is *holy*. It's holiness comes from God, who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (also known as the Holy Trinity). Even though we sin, God wants all of us to be holy. He promises to help us become holy.

The Church is *catholic*. The word “catholic” means “universal.” Jesus told the apostles to make disciples of all nations. God wants us to welcome all people into his family, which is the Church.

The Church is *apostolic*. Jesus taught the apostles about God and prepared them to be the first leaders of the Church. The apostles became the first bishops, and since then, the Holy Spirit has continued to guide the pope and other bishops so that they can continue the work of Christ.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Which Mark of the Church do you think is the most important? Why?
2. Choose one of the Marks of the Church. How would the Church be different without it?
3. The Church is made up of people from all over the world! Explain how we can serve as ONE with other Catholics who live far away.

Connect

How does your parish show that it has all four marks of the Church?

Reflect

Imagine you are talking to someone who does not know what the Marks of the Church are.

To explain these characteristics, describe how your parish is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

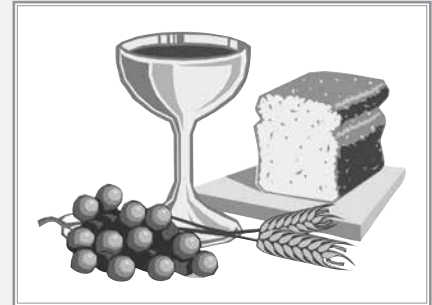
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HOLY EUCHARIST

He took some bread in his hands. Then after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Eat this and remember me." After the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine in his hands and said, "This is my blood, and with it God makes his new agreement with you. Drink this and remember me. (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Read

The **Sacrament of Holy Eucharist** allows us to remember and share in Jesus' sacrifice. We celebrate the Eucharist at Mass, just as Jesus asked us to at the **Last Supper**. As Catholics, we believe that Jesus is truly present with us under the forms of bread and wine. This sacrament is also called *Holy Communion*.



When we celebrate the Eucharist as a parish, it's like we are sharing a big family meal together. We use bread and wine to celebrate the Eucharist because Jesus did this at the Last Supper. The bread, which we call the **host**, is made from unleavened wheat; the wine is made from grapes. The priest begins the celebration by preparing the altar as our gifts of bread and wine are brought to it. During the Eucharistic prayer, we join as God's family in praising him and giving him thanks. The priest reminds us of the death and Resurrection of Jesus. We believe that the Holy Spirit helps us follow Jesus' actions during the Last Supper and transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. After the Eucharistic prayer, the congregation prays the Our Father together and greets one another with the Sign of Peace. Once we have prepared ourselves to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we walk in a procession to receive the Eucharist. We hold our hands in front of us to receive the host. The priest proclaims, "The Body of Christ," and we answer, "Amen." We then spend time in quiet prayer until everyone has received the Eucharist. The priest ends the celebration by blessing the congregation.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why do we greet each other with the Sign of Peace before receiving the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist?
2. What are some things you can pray about after you receive this sacrament?
3. Why do you think the Eucharist is considered the most important part of Mass?

Connect

Who are the Eucharistic ministers in your parish? What do they do?

Reflect

Imagine you were present at the Last Supper. Write a newspaper article about the first time Jesus turned bread and wine into his Body and Blood.

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HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.
(Matthew 18:20)

Read

On **holy days of obligation**, we must attend Mass and participate in the celebration. The third commandment tells us to keep holy the Lord's Day, and Sunday is considered the most important holy day of obligation. Celebrating the Lord's Day helps strengthen our relationship with God, the Church, and each other. On these days, we are reminded of God's love for us and thank God for the things he has blessed us with.

Catholics are also asked to celebrate special holy days throughout the year that do not fall on Sunday. All Catholics are obligated to attend Mass on these days:

On January 1, the eighth day after Christmas, we celebrate the *solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*. On this day, we remember Mary as the one God chose to give birth to his Son.

Forty Days after Easter, we celebrate the *solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord*. This is when we remember Jesus rising into heaven to be with God, his Father.

On August 15, we celebrate the *solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. We remember Mary rising, body and soul, into heaven.

On November 1, we celebrate the *solemnity of All Saints' Day*. We remember all of the saints, known and unknown, and how they are our models of how to live God's way.

December 8 is when we celebrate the *solemnity of the Immaculate Conception*. On this day, we celebrate the Mary's perfect conception, free of sin and with special grace from God.

On December 25, we celebrate the *solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord*. We remember the birth of Jesus and how he came to save us from sin.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why it is important to attend Mass on holy days of obligation?
2. Think about one of the holy days of obligation. In addition to attending Mass, what else can you do to celebrate and honor this special day?
3. What are some special Catholic days we celebrate that are not holy days of obligation?

Connect

Describe something special your parish does to celebrate the solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord.

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Reflect

Think of a special person or event in the Bible. Write a letter to the pope explaining why you think there should be a Holy Day of Obligation for this person or event.

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SIN

Everyone who sins breaks God's law, because sin is the same as breaking God's law.
(1 John 3:4)

Read

God gives us rules to follow because he loves us and wants us to be happy. He wants us to live holy lives so that we can join him in heaven. When we think, say, or do something that goes against God's will, it is called a **sin**. When we sin, we damage our relationship with God.

In the book of Genesis, we learn the story of **original sin**. Adam and Eve decided to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree, even though God had told them not to. This was the original sin because they willingly turned away from God and his wishes.

God dislikes all sin. However, there are different types of sin, and some sins are much worse than others. Some sins are more harmful than others, which is why we recognize two different types of sin: mortal sin and venial sin.

A **mortal sin** is a sin that is very serious and separates us from God. The Church teaches us that there are three things that make a sin a mortal sin:

1. The sin must be an act that is *very seriously wrong* (such as murder).
2. The person committing the sin must *fully understand* that what they are doing is wrong.
3. The person committing the sin must do so with *complete consent*.

A person cannot commit a mortal sin by accident.

A **venial sin** is a sin that is not as serious as a mortal sin. A venial sin disappoints God, but does not separate us from him. Venial sins often hurt others. If we ignore these sins without feeling truly sorry for them, we offend God, and sometimes go on to commit even worse sins.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Give some examples of mortal sin and venial sin. How can you tell what kind of sin it is? Was the original sin of Adam and Eve a mortal sin or a venial sin? Why?
2. When you sin, how does it hurt you? How does it hurt your family and friends? How does it hurt God?
3. What are some things that lead to sin? What can you do to avoid these things?

Connect Sins have consequences. What are some consequences for sinning in your home?

Reflect

Pretend that you have been asked to teach the first-grade class in your school about sin. Write a step-by-step description of how you will present this lesson to the students.

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MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

Read

The **Mysteries of the Rosary** are events in the lives of Jesus and Mary that we think about while praying the Rosary. There are four types of mysteries: the Joyful Mysteries, the Luminous Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Glorious Mysteries. There are five mysteries in each category.

The **Joyful Mysteries** are about the conception and birth of Jesus. The Joyful Mysteries include the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation of Baby Jesus, and the Finding of Jesus in the Temple.

The **Luminous Mysteries** are about the life and mission of Jesus. The Luminous Mysteries include Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, the Wedding at Cana, the Proclamation of the Kingdom, the Transfiguration, and the Institution of the Eucharist.

The **Sorrowful Mysteries** are about the suffering and death of Jesus. The Sorrowful Mysteries include the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion.

The **Glorious Mysteries** are about events after the death of Jesus. The Glorious Mysteries include the Resurrection of Jesus, the Ascension of Jesus, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Assumption of Mary, and the Coronation of Mary.

We meditate on a different group of mysteries each day. We meditate on the Joyful Mysteries on Monday and Saturday; the Luminous Mysteries on Thursday; the Sorrowful Mysteries on Tuesday and Friday; and the Glorious Mysteries on Wednesday and Sunday.

See page 70 for a list of Bible references for the mysteries.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. What does it mean to "meditate" on something? Why is it important to meditate on these mysteries when we pray the Rosary?
2. Choose the Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, or Glorious Mysteries. What happens in each mystery in this group? Where do the events occur, and who is involved in each event?
3. The Luminous Mysteries were just added to the Rosary in 2002 by Pope John Paul II. Why do think they were added, and why are they are called the Luminous Mysteries?

Connect

Do you think it is easier to meditate on the Mysteries of the Rosary in church or at home? Why?

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Reflect

Think about an event in the life of Jesus or Mary that is NOT included in the mysteries, and explain why you think it should be. Which type of mystery would this event be?

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