

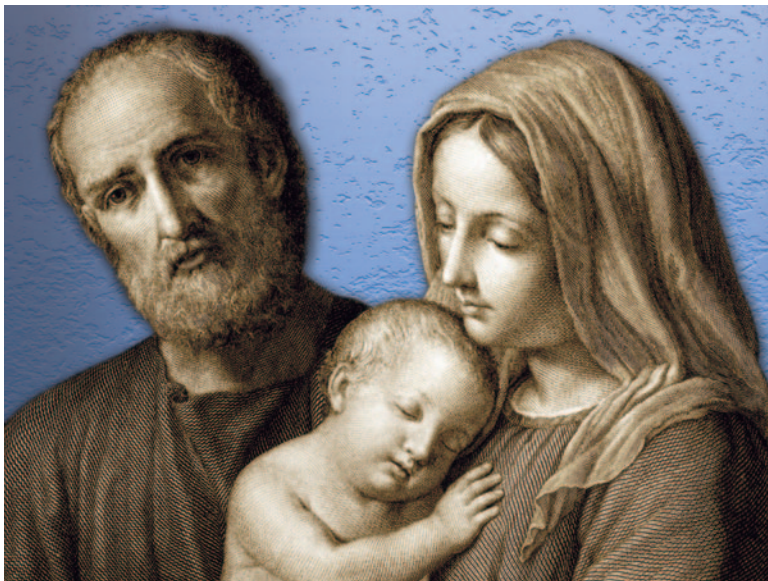


Faith: Questions & Answers

Father John V. McGuire, C.Ss.R

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Faith:

Questions & Answers

1. I have heard people translate Romans 8:15 as “You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back to fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out ‘Abba’ (that is, ‘Daddy’).” Isn’t this disrespectful?

The word “Abba” is actually the affectionate word children used for their fathers. It is equivalent to our “papa,” “daddy,” or “dad.” Saint Paul was trying to emphasize the closeness we have with God through adoption. So “daddy” really comes close to Saint Paul’s “Abba.” In our culture we may not feel comfortable with the translation, but it can hardly be called wrong or disrespectful. (cf. CCC 2779)*

2. What is the “abomination of desolation?”

A more modern translation of Matthew 24:15 is “the abominable and destructive thing.” The prophet Daniel in 9:27 speaks of the appearance of an abominable event in the temple as a sign of the destruction of paganism. Jesus in Matthew 24 refers to this and tells that the prophecy is near to being fulfilled. The Book of Daniel referred to a pagan statue that the Emperor Antiochus IV erected in the Jewish Temple around 160 B.C. After the Roman General Titus destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D., a similar offensive pagan statue was erected on the Temple location. The expression reflects the disgust of the Jewish people over these desecrations of their most sacred place.

*CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church

3. Why is Abraham, in the Mass, called “our father in faith”?

As one reads in Genesis 11:27 and the following chapters, God initiated his plan of salvation with a call to Abraham (or Abram) to leave his native land (modern Iraq) and migrate westward to Canaan (modern Palestine) where he would build him into a great nation and make his descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky. Abraham believed God and set out as directed. Hence Abraham is our father in faith in this sense — that he was the first to believe. But the meaning is deeper, as Saint Paul notes (Romans 9:6-13 and Galatians 3:29), namely that the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants are blessings we receive because we are Abraham’s descendants, not necessarily in blood, but in faith (that is, in our supernatural relationship with God). (cf. CCC 145)

4. What is “Abraham’s bosom?”

The expression is familiar to readers from the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. One has to remember the custom of reclining rather than sitting at table. As one reclined, resting on his left side he seemed to be resting in the bosom of the person to his left. Abraham is pictured in eternity at the privileged place or “right hand of God.” This would put him “in God’s bosom.” And Lazarus is pictured “at the right hand of Abraham.” This would put him in Abraham’s bosom. Obviously the imagery is not to be taken literally. What is meant is that Lazarus enjoys the same enduring happiness as Abraham. (cf. CCC 633)

5. In some of the Church Councils we read the phrase, “Let him be anathema.” What does this mean?

The word means a ban or a curse. The formula as used by the Church refers to excommunication, public notice that the person anathematized, in what he is teaching, is at serious odds with the Catholic faith community. This pronouncement does not imply damnation, for only God can judge, but it advises the faithful to beware of the false teaching and invites the erring one to reconsider his position. One finds evidence of the practice of excommunication in both the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 7:1f.; Matthew 18:7; Galatians 1:8). (cf. CCC 1463)

6. There are times in the Gospel, like the time Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple, when he seems angry. Isn't anger a sin?

In itself, anger is not a sin. It is defined as that passion of the human spirit, which reacts to evil, real or imagined. If the reaction is moderate and constructive, anger may be evidence of zeal for what is of real value. It should be noted that in the temple incident, Jesus did not use the whip on people but used it to drive out the livestock. (cf. CCC 584)

7. What is the significance of anointing with oil?

The ancient practice of anointing a person with oil, often with perfumed oil, has several meanings, all of them related. The anointed person is recognized as a “marked or sacred person,” set apart in certain ways from the community the better to be of service to the community. As an action of the community it also signifies the pledge of the community to respect and support the one anointed. In many ways the significance of anointing is similar to the granting of public degrees and licenses to special

persons who serve the community, such as doctors, lawyers, pharmacists and the like. Christian sacramental anointing goes far beyond the merely human practice and relates the anointee and the anointing community authoritatively (by the authority of Christ and effectively through the gift of the Spirit) directly to God in his saving work. Anointing with oil was also a common medicinal practice in early times and therefore a fitting sign of the spiritual healing effected in the sacrament of anointing of the sick. (cf. CCC 1499)

8. Who or what is the Anti-Christ?

Saint John speaks of Anti-Christ and Anti-Christes and describes them as certain definite persons who pretend to be the real messiahs and deny Christ this role. Saint Paul speaks of the coming of the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3), the mystery of sin (2:7), the outlaw (2:8). The general impression given is that the Anti-Christ will be one person in particular, not Satan but the minister of Satan — the very embodiment of wickedness who will strive to undo all of Christ's redeeming work. No one is quite sure how to interpret these direful passages. Through the ages there have been many religious enthusiasts who claimed to identify some contemporary person or institution and consequently announce that the day of final struggle and judgment had arrived. Such announcements of doom, Armageddon, and all the rest, have proved immature. (cf. CCC 675)

9. What is an apostle?

The word means one sent out as a messenger or representative. The special meaning of the word refers to the twelve men who were chosen by Christ (in symbolic reference to the twelve Patriarchs of Israel) as his special messengers and the core group of his Church. (cf. CCC 76)

10. What are the names of the Apostles?

They are Simon (called Cephas or Peter); Andrew (Peter's brother); James (the Greater, or older, son of Zebedee and Salome); John (brother of James the Greater); Philip of Bethsaida; Bartholomew (actually a last name "Bar-Tolmai," son of Tolmai), whose first name was probably Nathanael; Thomas (called Didymus, a twin); Matthew or Levi, son of Alpheus, a former tax collector; James the Less, son of Clopas and Mary and a close blood relative of Jesus; Jude also called Thaddeus, brother of James the Less; Simon of the Zealot Party; Judas of Carioth who betrayed Jesus. Matthias was chosen (Acts 1:26) to replace Judas. In addition to these twelve, the Church in her liturgy honors Paul of Tarsus and Barnabas of Cyprus as Apostles since they were regarded as such by the other Apostles. (cf. Matthew 10:2)

11. What is Armageddon?

The word means "mountain of Meggido." This is spoken of in Revelation 16:16 as the site of a great battle at the end of the world. In writing Revelation, John probably chose the name because Meggido and the nearby plain of Esdraelon were popularly identified with bloody battles. Such battles were related in Judges 5:19; 2 Samuel 9:27; and Zechariah 12:11. The Dragon or Beast, and the false prophet will ensnare and assemble the kings of the whole earth on the Great day of God in their struggle against God and Jesus Christ. Thus "Armageddon" symbolizes the ultimate uprising of the forces of evil and their definitive defeat by the returning Redeemer crowned with glory. The language is figurative. The final judgment is real. The day and the hour, despite the predictions of many, are God's own secret. "But of that day and hour, no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36).

12. Is Babylon really the Catholic Church, as some non-Catholics say it is?

Babylon in its literal sense is the name of an ancient city on the Euphrates River (modern day Iraq). It was to this city and its environs that the Israelites were deported by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. They were released in 538 by Cyrus, the Persian.

Babylon, because of this experience, came to be a term for evil governments and was applied in a figurative sense to pagan institutions. This figurative use was carried into Christian times by converts from Judaism, the Apostles among them. In the early years of Roman persecution, Babylon became a code word among Christians for pagan Rome. It is in this sense that the name “Babylon” for pagan Rome is used by John in Revelation (for example in 14:8) and by Peter (in 1 Peter 5:13). The idea that the word applies to the “Roman” Catholic Church has no justification in fact. It was born of the anti-Catholic feeling of the Reformation era.

13. A Mormon friend talked to me about “baptism of the dead.” He said it was in Scripture. Is this true?

Baptism of the dead is referred to by Saint Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20. The text requires careful reading in the context of the whole of Chapter 15 concerning the resurrection of the dead. The Corinthians seem to have had a custom that if a catechumen (someone under instruction but not yet baptized) died without baptism, a member of the community would receive baptism in his name. This was not sacramental nor did it affect the dead person but simply celebrated his intention to be baptized and the saving effect of his grace-supported intention. (God saves all who sincerely wish to be saved.)

This custom was born of a belief in the resurrection. When Paul came to speak of the resurrection, therefore, and to calm the fears of those who were beginning to doubt it, one of his lesser arguments amounted to this: How can you express belief in the resurrection through baptizing the dead and at the same time not believe in it? All he is doing is pointing to an inconsistency in their thinking. He passes no judgment on their harmless custom.

As time went on, certain heretics like the Montanists taught that baptism of the dead was sacramental and effective in saving the dead. This was condemned by the Church as heretical.

14. What is baptism of the Spirit?

This is the experience which charismatics have in their prayer meetings and consists in a new and deeper realization of the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church and in the individual believer. It is not the sacrament of baptism, but is no doubt related to the graces of baptism in those who have already been baptized. Contrary to some non-Catholic charismatics, Catholics do not see this experience as separated from the ministry of the institutional Church but rather as deepening one's faith in Christ present and active within his Church.

15. What and why is the difference between the Catholic and Protestant Bible?

In the New Testament, both the Catholic and the Protestant Bibles have the same 27 books.

At the time of Christ and the Apostles there was a Hebrew Bible and a Greek translation (called by later scholars the Septuagint) used by the Greek-speaking Jews. Both were considered

authentic Scripture. Many of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are from the Septuagint version.

For the Old Testament, the Catholic tradition has retained the Septuagint Bible which had 46 books. The Protestant tradition follows the 24 books of the Hebrew text as regards content, but most of those are rearranged in sequence and several are divided, giving a total of 39 books. Catholic editions of the Old Testament contain the rearranged 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures plus seven others which are current in the official Latin Vulgate Bible and which Protestants include among the apocrypha.

It might be assumed that the Hebrew version is the more ancient canon (official collection) but the fact is that the Jews made no distinction between the Hebrew and the Greek Bibles. In Judaism at the time of Christ, both Bibles were used interchangeably. The Jews did not establish an official Bible until the second century after Christ.

16. What is a “born again” Christian? Are Catholics “born again?”

The phrase “born again” as used in Saint John’s Gospel (3:3-9) and in Saint Peter’s Epistle (1 Peter 1:23) actually refers to the divine adoption which takes place at baptism. The person who was born once in the natural process is “reborn” or “born again” by being received into a life of a superior order.

Since many Catholics are baptized as infants, the faith necessary for baptism is supplied by their parents and the Church Community (parish) to which they belong. The parents should nourish the child’s faith through Christian formation (prayer, example, teaching) so that eventually, as a responsible adult,

he would validate in his own name the acts of faith made for him at baptism.

When Catholics, for whatever reason, come to adulthood without proper formation in the Catholic faith, they really end up with nothing. Many drift off into the unchurched. Some come under the influence of Catholic outreach programs and begin to have real faith in their own right. Others come under the influence of Protestant out-reach programs and end up Protestants. Among the Protestants, several groups promote a build-up to a certain emotionally charged conversion experience. Faith moves from mere theory to a felt conviction. They refer to this as the “New Birth” and those who experience it as “born again” Christians.

The grace of God is at work in all this, of course, and we must marvel at it. A believing Protestant Christian is certainly more authentic than a merely nominal Catholic. Nevertheless, there is cause for some sadness here. Catholic Christianity is certainly more complete and fulfilling in itself than any other form of Christianity so there really is no need for people to leave in order to be holier. Further, we have to regret the terrible breakdown on the part of parents and parishes in regard to the Catholic formation of their young. If only they had been properly raised, Catholics baptized as infants would know they are already “born again Christians” and need only to correspond intelligently and deliberately to their baptismal graces which are capable of being activated throughout their entire life. (cf. CCC 1212)

17. I believe the Bible is God's word and anyone who reads it can understand its meaning. Is this the way Catholics see the Bible?

Catholics do not see the Bible quite in this way. True, it was inspired by God, and the Holy Spirit is its principal author. But it was written in human language by men who expressed themselves in accord with the language and customs of their times. Further, before the words were written down, the revelation was handed on from one generation to another in spoken tradition. Hence the words of the Bible often need to be interpreted in light of what the original authors meant to say. Only a living tradition can give us such meanings—there are no footnotes in the original Bible.

Hence Catholics read the Bible in light of the living tradition of the Church, guided by those commissioned to teach in the Church. Scholars of ancient language and literature and similar fields of study also help to clarify meanings.

This is not to say, however, that only scholars should read the Bible. By no means. The Bible is a privileged place of God's presence in the world and one who reads the sacred text with reverence and attention will surely be enriched by the Holy Spirit. But prayer and prayerful contemplation are one thing, doctrinal teaching another. (cf. CCC 109)

18. When was Jesus born?

No exact dates have come down to us. The Gospels speak of the event as taking place while Herod the Great was still alive (Matthew 2: 1ff.). Since Herod died in 4 B.C., Jesus presumably was born no later than that year. Another text (Luke 2:1) speaks of a census ordered by Augustus Caesar. There is evidence that the emperor ordered a census in the years 28 B.C., 8 B.C. and

14 A.D. The 8 B.C. year seems to fit in best with the Gospel. Hence, we conclude that Jesus was born no earlier than 8 B.C. and no later than 4 B.C. Those who devised the Christian calendar were, therefore, at least four years off the mark.

If there is some uncertainty about the year, there is more about the date. For whatever reason it was chosen, the date of December 25 is the day for liturgical celebration of Christ's birth. It should be remembered that it is the fact of Jesus' birth and not the date which is the revealed truth which we believe.

19. Some say the Church adopted a pagan feast celebrated in late December. Is this true?

There may have been some hope on the part of the Church to offset the influence of a pagan feast of the sun celebrated around this time. This is not the same as saying the Church absorbed paganism.

20. Why do we speak of blessing God? How could a human being bless God?

Obviously "bless" in this case does not mean the same as it does in the case of God blessing us. When we say, "blessed be God" we mean "may he be adored, praised before mankind, and thanked for his benefits."

21. If God is one, how can Jesus Christ be God as well as the Father?

God has revealed to the Church that to be God is to be one and three at the same time. Three Persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — are all equally God. In a way that surpasses human comprehension, these three are all perfectly one. There are three distinct persons, yet one divine nature or essence. The

only distinction within God is that resulting from the relationship among the three persons. The Father eternally begets the Son; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. God is not a solitary existence that contemplates itself; God is a perfect communion of three persons. The great sign of God's love for us is that through Jesus Christ we are offered the possibility of sharing in the inner life of God, of taking part in the perfect communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (cf. CCC 237)

22. How was Mary always a virgin when Jesus had “brothers and sisters?”

The Scriptures (Matthew 13:55) only seem to say that Jesus had blood brothers and sisters. The original Greek text reflects the Aramaic usage. In the Aramaic language which Jesus used, the words “brother” and “sister” can refer to cousins as well as blood brothers and sisters. Hence, the passage in Matthew 13:55 cannot be taken to mean that Mary had other children. The four men mentioned in this passage are James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude. The father of James was Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3) and he is presumably also the father of Joseph since both had the same mother, Mary, wife of Alphaeus (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40). We know nothing of the family of the other two. Something that seems to indicate that they were also cousins and not brothers of Jesus is the fact that, on the cross, Jesus entrusted his mother to the Apostle John. Why would he have done this if there were other sons to care for her? And further, if there were other sons, why were they not on hand when their “brother” was being executed? In a word, there is no biblical evidence that Mary had other children or that Jesus had blood brothers and sisters. (cf. CCC 500)

23. If Cain and Abel were the only children of Adam and Eve when Abel was murdered, where did Cain find a wife (Genesis 4:13)?

This is a problem only to those who take everything in the Scripture at face value. Studies of ancient literature of the near East show that the Cain and Abel story in one form or another was already long in existence when the inspired author wrote this portion of Genesis. He was writing, incidentally, not as an on-the-spot reporter but as a member of the Hebrew community centuries after the early days of creation. His purpose is not to give a detailed history or genealogy of the human race but simply, in the part of Genesis following the fall of Adam and Eve, to show how the effects of their sin appeared in a whole plague of human sins: jealousy, deceit, and even murder. One must learn to look for the religious teaching intended by the authors of Scripture and not for answers to problems they did not consider.

24. What is the significance of burning candles at religious services?

Candles were an advance over oil lamps as men learned to use wax in place of oil. Whether as lamps or candles, these light sources were no doubt originally used simply as illumination so that worshippers could see and read in dark places. Eventually the utilitarian purpose became combined with the symbolism of self-offering. As oil and wax in burning eventually are consumed in service, so the worshipper wishes to consecrate himself wholly to God. A secondary symbolism also developed — that of the lamp/candle representing the continuing prayer of the person who lit it. (cf. CCC 1189)

25. What is the Canon of Sacred Scripture?

This is an expression that refers to the list of books officially recognized by the Church as authentic Scripture (see question 15). (cf. CCC 120)

26. What is Canon Law?

The word “canon” literally means a reed. The expression came to mean a “rule” or “norm” because an agreed-upon length of reed was used much as we use a yardstick. Thus “canons” are norms of the Catholic Church. The Code of Canon Law was revised and put into effect by Pope John Paul II in 1983. There are 1752 norms or canons.

27. What is meant by the Captivity Letters?

These are the letters written while Saint Paul was in prison for the first time in Rome. They are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

28. What are the cardinal virtues?

These have their name from the Latin word “cardo,” meaning “hinge.” They are the moral virtues on which hinge all truly religious and virtuous behavior. They are a participation in divine wisdom according to the Book of Wisdom (8:7): “or if one loves justice, the fruits of her works are virtues; for she teaches moderation and prudence, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these.” Hence the traditional enumeration of the cardinal or moral virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. (cf. CCC 1805)

29. What are the Catholic epistles?

Catholic” here is taken in the sense of “universal” and, therefore, refers to the fact that these letters are addressed to all the faithful and not to a specific person or local Church. The Council of Trent listed these epistles as: Peter (I and II), John (I, II, III), James, and Jude.

30. What is the Cenacle?

This is the “Upper Room” of a two-storied house in Jerusalem at the time of Christ. It is thought to have belonged to the parents of John Mark. Tradition links it to the Last Supper, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the place of assembly of the young Church, and the death or “falling asleep” of the Blessed Virgin. The original edifice no longer exists but the site is now marked by an edifice built by the Crusaders and subsequently turned into a mosque by the Turks. Presently it is owned by Israel but the Franciscan Custodians of the Holy Places have a chapel and monastery nearby.

31. What is the difference between a “Christian” and a “Catholic”?

In the ideal state of Christian unity there would be no difference: all Christians would be Catholics. In the first Christian centuries, this was the actual state of affairs. There was one Christian Church and because it was everywhere united it could be called “Catholic” or “universal.” When the Church first began, the first believers were probably called “Nazareans” or followers of Jesus the Nazarene. At Antioch, they began to be called Christians (Acts 11:26), possibly because Nazareth had no real significance for converts of non-Jewish origin. Saint Ignatius of Antioch writing in the first decade of the second century is our first witness to the use of the term “Catholic Church.” He used

“Catholic” as a common adjective, meaning “universal,” but the adjective soon became a proper adjective since it applied to the then total Christian Church.

Unfortunately, with the Eastern Schism in 1054 and later with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, divisions occurred in the Christian Church. Hence today, all Catholics are Christians, but not all Christians are Catholics.

32. What is the communion of saints?

The communion of saints means the intimate union in Christ and through Christ of all his members among themselves and with the Father in the Holy Spirit. This includes those in grace on earth, those in purgatory, and those in glory in heaven. Speaking of his relationship with his true followers, Jesus compared himself to a vine and his disciples to the branches, both living the same life (John 15:1-8). Saint Paul spoke of this living union in terms of a human body with Christ as the Head and the faithful as members (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

This communion includes the blessed in heaven. In Revelation 6:9-11, we read of the martyrs now in glory with Christ, the Lamb. There would seem to be a reference also to this heavenly branch of the union in Colossians 1:19-20: “For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross, whether those on earth or those in heaven.” The case for the inclusion of those in purgatory is supported by 2 Maccabees 12:43-46. (cf. CCC 946)

33. What are we to think of the many predictions about the Second Coming of Christ?

Jesus and the Apostles spoke of Christ's Second Coming as the definitive final act of the world's history (John 5:21-29). Our Lord explicitly taught, however, that only the Father knows the day of the last judgment and that neither the angels nor he himself (as man) has this knowledge. Hence even the most ingenious explanations of those who predict near or distant doomsday are simply meaningless speculation. Some would make God out to be a puzzle writer providing us with clues to the answers. The Scriptures support none of this. What they do support is the admonition to live every day as if it were our last. "Stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42) (cf. CCC 675).

34. What is conscience?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (nn. 1795-1802), in continuity with the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution On the Church in the Modern World (n. 16), summarizes: "Conscience is man's most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. For the man who has committed evil, the verdict of his conscience remains a pledge of conversion and of hope.

"A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. Everyone must avail himself of the means to form his conscience.

"Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on

the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them. A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. Conscience can remain in ignorance or make erroneous judgments. Such ignorance and errors are not always free of guilt.

“The Word of God is a light for our path. We must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. This is how moral conscience is formed.”

35. What does the Catholic Church teach in regard to the evolution of the human race?

If the bodily evolution of the human species is ever definitively established as fact, the Church could accept it, holding always that God is the Creator and that the process was always under his control. The evolution in question here would only be that of the human body. Every human person, as person, endowed with a unique soul, is created directly by God. Therefore, a Catholic may believe in evolution as long as it is seen as part of God's design.

36. What does the Creed mean by “he descended into Hell?”

This is not a reference to the hell of the damned but to the abode of the just of the Old Testament, often called the “Limbo of the Fathers” or “Abraham's Bosom” (Luke 16:22). In 1 Peter 3:19, we read: “In [the spirit] he [Christ] also went to the spirits in prison.” The “prison” referred to here is often taken to mean the abode of those who died in God's grace prior to Christ's resurrection. The visit of Jesus in spirit was to announce their liberation through his Passion and Death. (cf. CCC 631)

37. The Church interprets Mark 10:11 strictly as not allowing marriage after divorce as long as one's partner is alive. How can the Church allow those with annulments to remarry?

An annulment is not a divorce. It does not dissolve a valid marriage. It states that by reason of some impediment at the time the ceremony was performed, no real marriage took place. Examples of such impediments would be lack of necessary age, grave immaturity, force or fear imposed by parents or others, failure to observe the ritual formalities, and so on. Impediments to marriage are treated in Catholic Information Service pamphlet #301, *The Catholic Teaching on Annulment: Preserving the Sanctity of Marriage*. (cf. CCC 1625)

38. Why is the Holy Spirit spoken of as appearing in the form of a dove at the Baptism of Jesus?

Clearly, as a divine spirit, the Holy Spirit has no body of any sort. There is question here of the use of a visible symbol for an invisible reality—that as the dove was seen to descend upon Jesus, actually the invisible Spirit of God descended upon him designating him as the representative of God's new People, much as God was said to come down on Israel in the Exodus (Exodus 19:18). There may also be a reference here to Isaiah's prayer: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down" (Isaiah 63:19) (cf. CCC 535).

39. "Easter" was originally a pagan Spring festival. Why do Christians celebrate it?

The English language word "Easter" may be pagan in origin. It has been applied in popular language to the Church feast whose proper name is Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord. The feast does not celebrate the reawakening of nature, as was the case with a pagan celebration, but the glorious Resurrection

of Jesus which, together with his Passion and Death, achieved our salvation.

40. I keep reading the word “eschatology.” What does it mean?

The word, derived from two Greek words, means the doctrine of last things or of final times. It is the theological consideration of what happens to the individual human at the end of life and of what will happen at the end of the world.

What Catholic eschatology treats of in reference to the individual person includes death, particular judgment, heaven, purgatory, or hell. What Catholic eschatology treats of in reference to the end of the world includes events which are described in the Bible as occurring before the end (like the preaching of the Gospel to all nations, the great apostasy, the coming of the Anti-Christ, the final conversion of the Jews) and events which will mark the end (the general resurrection of the dead, the coming of Christ, and the Last Judgment). (cf. CCC 638)

41. What does the Church teach regarding death?

It teaches that it is one of the consequences of original sin: “just as through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death” (Romans 5:12). It teaches that death brings a separation of the body from the soul or spirit and that although the body decomposes, the soul or spirit lives on; not indeed in suspended animation or a “big sleep” until the end of the world, as some suppose, but in truly conscious life. In Luke 16:25-31, Jesus speaks of the dead rich man and of Lazarus as already experiencing their respective punishment and reward. In Revelation 6:9, the spirits of the dead martyrs are found to be alive and in the presence of God (the One seated on the throne—Revelation 5:13). (cf. CCC 635)

42. What does the Church teach regarding the particular judgment that occurs at the moment of one's death?

It is not any kind of court scene, of course, as some preachers present it dramatically. Rather it is the permanent continuance in eternity of one's relationship with God at the moment of death. If one dies in a relationship of love and union, that state becomes permanent. If one dies alienated and separated from God, that state continues. (cf. CCC 1021)

43. What does the Church teach in regard to those who die in a relationship of love and union with God?

If one's relationship is free of all trace of sin, one enters the state of perfect union with God which is heaven. If one's loving relationship is real but still laboring under the need for further purification, one enters the state of purification called purgatory until one is ready for heaven. If one's relationship with God at death is total alienation, one enters the state of eternal loss which is hell.

44. What does the Church teach about events that will occur before the end of the world?

We find the following predictions in Sacred Scripture:

1. The Gospel will be preached to the whole world. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).
2. There will be a great apostasy, a massive falling away from faith. "You will be hated by all nations because of my name. And then many will be led into sin; they will betray and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and

deceive many; and because of the increase of evil-doing, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:9-12).

3. Anti-Christ, some sort of powerful figure will appear as Satan’s agent and will oppose Christ and seek to destroy his work (see question 8 above).

4. The conversion of the Jews as a people to Christ. “I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers... a hardening has come upon Israel in part, until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, and thus all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25-26).

45. What does the Church teach regarding the actual end of the world?

It teaches:

1. That all the human race will rise body and spirit. “The hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28).

2. That Jesus will appear — “Come again in glory.” “And then the sign of the Son of Man [Christ] will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

3. That final judgment will be pronounced on all, making public the particular judgment received by each individual privately at the moment of death. Matthew 25:31-46 has a telling description of the last judgment. It closes with these words: “And these [the wicked] will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

4. That Jesus' accomplishment of the mission of redemption given him by the Father will be complete. "When everything is subjected to him [Christ], then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one [the Father] who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). (cf. CCC 1040)

46. If God is infinitely good, how can he create evil persons and things?

Persons and things as created by God are good in themselves. When they become evil, it is because their goodness is somehow diminished. Sometimes the good is diminished through a conflict of natural forces (as in the case of floods, hurricanes, and so on), or through human error (as in the case of innocent accidents), or through human sinfulness (as in carelessness, bad habits, abuse of the environment). When such evils have evil consequences, it cannot be said that God wills them directly. Rather it is a case of his allowing them to happen for the sake of preserving some greater good. When, for example, one falls from a building and is killed, God allows the death rather than invalidate the law of gravity upon which so much of the natural order depends. When one does something evil, God does not cause that person to do evil. Rather, God permits the person to do evil in order to preserve the free will of the person, which in itself is a good thing, even though it can be misused. When all is said and done, however, the mystery of evil and suffering is still a mystery. It is an area where we can really exercise true trust in God, holding on to belief in his goodness and love even when we do not understand the "why" of our suffering. (cf. CCC 309)

47. What is excommunication?

Literally it means exclusion of a person from a particular group or society. In Scripture, Jesus referred to excommunication in Matthew 18:15-17 where he told the Church that in the case of the wrongdoer, “if he refuses to listen to the Church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax-collector” (see question 5, “anathema”).

48. Does the Church approve of exorcisms?

Exorcism is the expulsion of evil spirits. The Church certainly believes in the existence of evil spirits. In his lifetime, Jesus expelled such spirits from those possessed (see Matthew 12:27; Mark 5:1-20). He gave this power to his Church. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons” (Matthew 10:7-8). Certain exorcisms are written into the sacramental ritual for Baptism. A ritual of solemn exorcism in extraordinary cases of diabolical possession is sometimes performed with the permission of the local bishop. Such ceremonies are relatively rare.

It should be noted also that certain illnesses which in a less scientific society were attributed to demons are now recognized as natural physical or mental disorders and treated accordingly. (cf. CCC 1673)

49. Why was the name of the sacrament of “Extreme Unction” changed to the “Anointing of the Sick”?

The change was made according to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Theologically, the new name is more correct since the seriously ill can be anointed even though they are not in their last (extreme) agony. Psychologically, the new

name removes the danger of alarming the patient who may or may not be on the point of death.

50. Can you give me a simple, workable definition of faith?

One definition of faith is “to accept and acknowledge the presence of God in one’s life.” Along with accepting God’s presence, one must accept what he reveals of himself and his teaching as one comes to understand these truths. For Christians, faith in God is acceptance of him and his teaching as revealed in and through Jesus Christ. This acceptance and acknowledgement has to be more than lip service, of course. Real personal commitment to love of God and neighbor is implied. (cf. CCC 146)

51. How does faith differ from reason?

There are some matters about which we can judge for ourselves whether or not something is true through our power of reason. The matter must not exceed the capacity of our reason and we must have sufficient evidence to make a secure judgment. There are other matters, however, about which we are not in a position to judge for ourselves whether or not something is true. In such cases, the only way we can come to a secure judgment is to rely on someone with greater knowledge as an authority on the subject. This is to take something as true on faith. There are many instances in human life in which our best course of action is to rely on those with greater expertise. God, of course, is the supreme authority on every subject. By faith in what has been revealed by God to the Church, we accept his teaching on all that is necessary for our salvation, including many truths that are simply beyond the capacity of human reason. (cf. CCC 35)

52. In Matthew 23:9, Jesus says: “Do not call anyone on earth your father.” Why then do Catholics call their priests “Father?”

One has to read this verse in the context of the whole passage. Jesus is not talking about the title in itself but rather in the way it was being used by the Scribes and Pharisees, that is to say, as a title of proud superiority rather than as a title of service to their brethren. The passage ends with the words: “The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” What Jesus is saying, in effect, is “You are God’s instruments as ‘rabbi,’ ‘father,’ ‘teacher.’ Don’t act as though you were independent of God.”

As a matter of fact, we find the title “father” given to men elsewhere in Scripture and, according to the principle of interpretation that Scripture does not contradict itself, we must hold that there are situations in which the title of father is lawful. In 2 Kings 2:12, Elisha calls Elijah “father.” In Luke 2:48, Mary calls Joseph “father.” In 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul refers to himself as “father” of the Church at Corinth.

Actually it is in a long tradition that spiritual guides are called “father” since, under God, they exercise a kind of spiritual guidance to their disciples much as a natural father does within the natural family. Priests in accepting the title “Father,” accept the responsibility under God of directing a certain portion of his family. (cf. CCC 239)

53. If God is a loving God, is it right to fear him?

The Gospel speaks of the fear of God in two ways: fear of God’s punishment and fear out of reverence for God’s majesty. Both are compatible with real love. Even in our everyday experience we hear young delinquents blame their parents because,

instead of correcting them when they were growing up, they either pampered them or neglected them. It is a loving parent who corrects his children and imposes penalties for misconduct. “Whom the Lord loves, he disciplines” (Hebrews 12:6).

There is, unfortunately, a tendency among some modern writers to filter out of the Gospel all references to punishment. This is a distortion. Nothing is a better cure for spiritual smugness than frequent reading of Matthew 25:31-46. Nothing brings one back from the dream world of “God does not punish” to reality as that last sentence, “[the unrepentant] will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” So much for fear of punishment. Blessed is the person who has some of this.

Reverential fear is respect for God and is actually part and parcel of faith. It is simply impossible to have a living relationship with God and be indifferent to what our sin and those of others do to his honor and glory. (cf. CCC 2090)

54. What is Gehenna?

The word means “Valley of Hinnom.” In early centuries the Jews had very vague ideas of the afterlife. People simply descended into “Sheol” which was “the abode of the dead.” In later times, they distinguished between a place of peace and a place of punishment. The place of punishment was called “Gehenna” after the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem where in pagan times human sacrifices were offered and in later times the Jews disposed of their garbage. The spiritual Gehenna was thus conceived as a place of revulsion, decay, and burning rubbish, a powerful figure of speech. In the New Testament, Gehenna is a synonym for the hell of the damned. For example: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one [God] who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28-29). (cf. CCC 1034)

55. Can you give me some basic notion about God?

The mystery of God can never be captured in human words or concepts, but we can learn about God through our power of reason and through what God reveals to us. On the philosophical level, we know that God is pure being, the source of all that exists or will exist. God does not have a body, but is entirely immaterial and spiritual. God transcends the world, existing beyond all time and place. There are no parts in God, for He is perfectly simple and perfectly one. God is good in a way that is beyond our comprehension; every kind of goodness that we find in created things pre-exists in God to an unimaginable degree.

On a theological level, through God's revelation to the people of Israel we have learned that the One God is also a just but supremely merciful Creator who maintains an active control over the history of the world and who has a plan of salvation for all who will accept it. Furthermore, through Jesus Christ we have learned that God is both one and three — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one in nature or essence and yet three persons. The life of God is a communion of three persons who are in an incomprehensible way perfectly one. God loves us so much that we are offered the possibility of sharing in the divine life through our union with Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. (cf. CCC 1)

56. Should we say Gospel (singular) or Gospels (plural)?

It depends on what you mean. As almost everyone knows, the word "Gospel" means "good news." In its Christian meaning, the "Good News" is the news of salvation preached by Jesus in his lifetime and transmitted to the world by the Apostles. Thus the

total message of salvation through Christ in the Spirit is the “Good News” par excellence, “the Gospel” (singular).

In the latter half of the first century four versions of Jesus’ message, based on oral and some written traditions, were written by the evangelists Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. We know their work today as the “Four Gospels.” Actually this is a kind of shorthand, if you will, for “The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to the four evangelists.” Hence in the liturgy, the Gospel is always announced as “A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark” (or Matthew, Luke, John).

57. What is the origin of the Catholic prayer, the Hail Mary?

This is a prayer that developed in the Church over a period of time. We have evidence that by the eleventh century, the Gospel phrase: “Hail, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women” was used as a prayer of salutation to Mary. By the fourteenth century, the words of Elizabeth were added together with the name, “Jesus.” “Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.” At some later date, probably in the sixteenth century, the “Holy Mary, etc.” was added. The prayer in its present form was recommended for general use by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. (cf. CCC 2676)

58. Why do some texts of the Hail Mary have “thee,” “thou” and “thy” while others have “you” and “your?”

The “you” and “your” are more in keeping with our everyday language, but most Catholics prefer to keep the older words as a time-honored tradition.

59. What is heaven?

We can speak of heaven as it is spoken of in the Bible, and we can speak of heaven as it is spoken of by theologians on the basis of what is found in the Bible.

In the Bible, the term “heaven,” is used in three ways: 1) as part of the physical universe, much in the sense of the sky or of outer space (as in Matthew 5:18: “until heaven and earth pass away”); 2) as the abode of God (as in Matthew 6:9: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”); 3) as a figure of speech for God himself (as in Matthew 5:20: “you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven”—that is, “the kingdom of God”).

In theology, heaven is spoken of as the state of eternal and perfect union with God (see question 43). (cf. CCC 659)

60. What does Saint Paul mean when he says he was “snatched up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:4)?

Modern versions of the Bible in English usually give this passage as “snatched up to Paradise.” “Paradise” here would be equivalent to “heaven” in the sense of the dwelling place of God. The original text does say: “third heaven.” The Jews sometimes spoke of three heavens: the area between ourselves and the stars, the area of the stars and planets, and, above these two “heavens,” the abode of God. In effect, Saint Paul is speaking of some form of ecstasy in which he had a vision of God.

61. In reading the Bible, I get confused about the different Herods. How many were there?

Herod the Great (39 B.C.-4 B.C.) was great in the worldly sense but not in any spiritual sense. He was the founder of the

Herodian dynasty, the builder of the last Temple in Jerusalem, and was monarch when John the Baptist and Jesus were born (Luke 1:5; Matthew 2:1). At this Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among his sons.

Archelaus (Herod's son, 4 B.C.-6 A.D.) ruled over Judea and because this was so, Saint Joseph took Jesus and Mary north to Nazareth (Matthew 2:22).

Herod Antipas (another son, 4 B.C.-39 A.D.) is the one who executed John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29). It was to him that Pilate sent Jesus as a prisoner (Luke 23:7-12).

Herod Philip (a third son, 4 B.C.-34 A.D.) ruled in the northeastern region of Palestine where Jesus promised the primacy to Peter (Matthew 16:13-20).

Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 37-44) was the nephew of Herod the Great. He does not appear in the Gospels but does appear in Acts as the one who persecuted the early Church, ordered the murder of James the Greater, and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1-5).

Herod Agrippa II (A.D. 49-86) was the son of Agrippa I. He appears in Acts as meeting Paul at the house of Festus in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast (Acts 25:13).

62. What is a holocaust?

A holocaust is a sacrifice of an animal victim with the slaughter of the same and its destruction by fire. The one who offers the holocaust wishes thereby to express acknowledgement of God's supreme dominion and a commitment to serve God faithfully, even at the cost of life itself. (cf. CCC 2583)

63. What is holiness?

If we start with God as the supremely holy one, we can describe holiness as infinite perfection, all conceivable life, love, and goodness, without any limit or imperfection. Moving on to creatures, we might describe holiness as participation in the holiness of God. This participation is essentially God's free gift offered to all, but he leaves all free to accept or reject it. As the offer is continuous throughout our lifetime, the need for acceptance on our part is also continuous. As one's acceptance continues, one's capacity for sharing in God's holiness increases, and so it is possible to grow in holiness. We believe that this grace (free gift) of participating in the holiness of God comes to us from the Father through the mediation of Christ and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. (cf. CCC 823)

64. Is idolatry still practiced in the world?

Idolatry is giving divine worship to anyone or anything that is not God. It is possible that there are primitive regions where people worship the kind of idols described in Scripture: "Their idols are silver and gold, the handiwork of men. They have eyes but see not, ears that hear not..." (Psalms 115). Whatever that situation may be, it seems that many of our contemporaries have idols of another sort: wealth, pleasure, power, to which they are much more committed than they are to God. (cf. CCC 2113)

65. What is meant by the inspiration of Sacred Scripture?

Inspiration is described as a supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the sacred writers, moving them to write what he wished written. (cf. CCC 105)

66. Do we have any basis for claiming the books of the Bible are inspired?

As a first consideration, we have the text from 2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

Then, in 2 Peter 3:15-16 we read: “And consider the patience of our Lord as salvation, as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, also wrote to you, speaking of these things as he does in all his letters. In them there are some things hard to understand that the ignorant and unstable distort to their own destruction, just as they do the other scriptures.”

Two points can be made about this second text. The first is that the phrase, “according to the wisdom given him,” refers to the special divine inspiration, which moved Paul to write. The second point is that the phrase, “the other scriptures,” refers to the Old Testament. Thus Paul’s writings are put on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures which everyone in the Church considered inspired.

It might be objected here that the argument assumes what it sets out to prove — namely that the Scriptures are inspired. But Catholics do not believe the Scriptures are inspired because certain passages say so. These passages only confirm what Catholics accept about Biblical inspiration on the authority of Christ teaching them through the voice of the magisterium of the Church (see question 86). (cf. CCC 76)

67. What can you say briefly about interpreting the Bible?

It is not the simple matter that many fundamentalist preachers make it out to be. As the inspired word of God, the Bible will give devout readers a sense of God’s presence and dispose

them to love him more deeply and to love their neighbors also. Reading the Scriptures as a form of prayer is one thing, reading them as a witness to divine revelation is another. It is in the latter sense that careful interpretation is necessary.

The Second Vatican Council, in its Decree On Divine Revelation (n. 12), says that the interpreter, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to make known by their words.

Hence, besides simply reading the text, one has to listen to the experts about the context of what is being said, the cultural situation of the writer, the type of composition he is using (poetry, prose, factual history, fable, symbolic or literal language). It's a large order. For Catholics, the ultimate norm is what the Church has traditionally believed and taught. (cf. CCC 84)

68. What advice would you give a Catholic who is beginning to read the Bible?

One is well-advised to study the Catechism of the Catholic Church together with the Bible. The catechism is a systematic treatment of what is contained in the Bible. Once people know their catechism, they will be able to read the Bible as the Church reads it. Where there appear to be contradictions, they will know at once that they are not interpreting the Bible correctly and seek advice.

69. Can you explain briefly the different “senses” of the Bible?

It is customary to speak of three senses: the literal, the typical, and the accommodated. The literal sense is not necessarily the first impression one has in reading a given passage. What is meant by the literal sense is the meaning which the original

author wished to convey. To ascertain this, one needs to consider such things as the type of literature being used, whether factual history, straight explanation, poetry, or other creative forms of expression such as parables, and so on. One needs also to consider the nuances of the original language and the cultural situation of the author. Obviously, the ordinary person will need to depend on the scholar for much of this and it is the wise reader who uses an approved commentary.

The typical sense is the meaning which a passage has in itself by way of foretelling something in the future. Thus the passage of the Israelites from slavery and waywardness to the security of the Promised Land under the leadership of Moses and Joshua foreshadows the passage of humankind under the leadership of Jesus into the Kingdom of God.

The accommodated sense is the figurative use of a passage in some context apart from that of the original author. An example would be the application of certain passages about divine wisdom which the Church in the liturgy applies to the Blessed Virgin Mary, “Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, whoever serves me will not fail” (Sirach 24:21). The accommodated sense is helpful in providing thoughts and words for one’s meditation but must be used cautiously in discussions of doctrine. (cf. CCC 115)

70. Are there different meanings to the word “Israel?”

This was a name given to the Patriarch Jacob. It was later applied to the nation which was formed of his twelve sons and their descendants. When the nation split into two kingdoms after the death of King Solomon (930 B.C.), the ten tribes of the North were called “the Kingdom of Israel” or simply “Israel.” The two tribes of the South formed the Kingdom of Judah. (cf. CCC 62)

71. What does “Jahweh” or “Jahveh” mean?

Literally, it means, “He is.” It is the reply God gave to Moses when he asked him his name (Exodus 3:14). This identifies God as the absolute, eternal, all-powerful Being. The Hebrew language in its earlier written stages did not print vowels, only consonants. Thus “Jahveh” appeared “JHVH.” Among the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.), the pronunciation of the Sacred Name was forbidden. From that time on in public readings whenever JHVH appeared in the text the reader did not say “JAHVEH” but “ADONAI” (Lord) or “ADONAI ELOHIM” (Lord God). (cf. CCC 206)

72. There are two apostles named James. Which one wrote the Epistle?

One James was the brother of the Apostle John and their family name was Bar-Zebedee. This James is often called the Greater in the sense of older. He was beheaded by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-2). An old tradition speaks of him as the Apostle of Spain and there is a famous pilgrimage shrine in his honor at Compostela, but there is no real evidence for his presence in Spain.

A second James (the Less), son of Alphaeus, is a brother of Jude Thaddeus. One of the brethren (cousins) of Jesus, he was called by Paul one of the pillars of the young Church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). It was he who authored the Epistle of James. He was martyred by being thrown from a high point on the temple wall.

73. What is one to think of the Book of Job?

By all accounts it is a masterpiece of human literature. For believers, it is also inspired Scripture. It is an imaginative

dramatic dialogue, part prose and part poetry, which reflects on the mystery of human suffering in relation to the goodness of God. It is written to teach that even the just may suffer here, and their sufferings are a test of their fidelity. They will be rewarded in the end. (cf. CCC 275)

74. In Matthew 12:40, we read: “Just as Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man spend three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth.” How was this a prophecy since Jesus did not spend three days and three nights in the grave?

The essence of the prophecy is in the prediction of Jesus’ resurrection after a period in the grave. Some commentators suggest that the expression “day and night” may have been a Hebrew way of expressing “a day” and, since they reckoned part of a day as a whole day, Jesus would have been in the grave — part of Friday, all of Saturday and part of Sunday — three days. (cf. CCC 994)

75. Is it certain that the Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus is damned in hell?

As far as we are concerned, no, it is not certain. In his case as in all others, we are forbidden to judge. True, we have these statements of Jesus in reference to Judas: “Yet is not one of you a devil?” (John 6:70) and “woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born” (Matthew 26:24). But these words are understood in the sense that Judas’ action was one of the tragic human events which led to the Passion and Death of Jesus. What the interior culpability of Judas was at the hour of his death is known only to God, to whom judgment belongs. (cf. CCC 597)

76. Is it true that there was another Apostle named “Judas?”

Yes, actually Saint Jude would have been called Judas in Hebrew. That’s why the betrayer is identified in the Gospel as Judas Iscariot (a family name). Pointedly, John 14:22 refers to Saint Jude as “Judas, not the Iscariot.” Saint Jude is known in Matthew 10 and Luke 18 as Thaddeus. He was a relative of Jesus and the brother of James the Less. Devotion to Saint Jude as the patron of those in dire need dates back to the time of Saint Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373 A.D.), to whom the devotion was revealed.

77. What is meant by the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God (also called the Kingdom of Heaven) is the name given to the Community of all those who accept the universal rule of God over their lives. Jesus in the Gospels is represented as having come to establish this Kingdom. Preparatory to his coming, the kingdom was prefigured in the Old Testament by all who acknowledged God as ruler of the universe. The Kingdom of Israel was seen as a visible sign of the development of this Kingdom temporarily confined for the most part to the believing Israelites but foreseen by some of the prophets as eventually including all humankind.

With Jesus, risen from the dead, the Kingdom left behind the confinement of Israel and became open to all. Jesus’ last mandate to the Apostles was “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

The subject of the Kingdom is a vast one. Only a few brief remarks are possible here. It is essentially a spiritual kingdom and one’s citizenship is based upon reunion with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit, a citizenship characterized by faith, hope, and loving obedience.

It is a kingdom “present now and yet to come,” “present now” in the sense that those who are united to God in love are already within the kingdom. “Yet to come” in the double sense of one’s being firmly established in it only after dying in grace, and in the sense that the kingdom itself will be complete only at the end of time when the last saved person has entered.

It is a universal kingdom open to all, as has already been noted. (cf. CCC 541)

78. How is the Kingdom of God different from the Church?

It depends on how you define the Church. If you mean by Church the assembly of all those who believe Christ to be the Son of God and who profess their Christian faith explicitly, the notion of church is narrower than that of the Kingdom of God. Those Christians are indeed in the Kingdom but there are others who also belong, those who, in good faith and enabled by grace, are faithful to their consciences even though they, through no fault of their own, do not explicitly believe in Christ. (cf. CCC 732)

79. What did Jesus know about himself and the world around him?

Because Jesus is both God and Man, much of his human psychology is a mystery. Since there has never been and never will be another God-Man, we have no outside source of study. So we have to walk a fine line between maintaining his divine nature on the one side and his human nature on the other. Some areas seem clear enough. Jesus had immediate and intimate knowledge of the Father and did not need the light of faith. He knew himself, the mystery of his person. His human knowledge extended to all that concerned him as Savior.

Theologians are accustomed to speak of his having three forms of human knowledge: Beatific vision — the direct vision of God enjoyed in heaven by the saints; infused human knowledge—given to him by divine illumination, as in the case of some prophets and mystics; and experiential knowledge—what humans learn by experience.

80. Why is Jesus called by John the Baptist the “Lamb of God?”

The prophecy of Isaiah 53 had spoken of the appearance one day of a Suffering Servant who in loving obedience to God would become a sacrificial victim offering himself in atonement for the sins of his people. In 53:7, it is said of this Servant: “Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth.” John the Baptist with prophetic vision saw Jesus as this Suffering Servant, this “Lamb” led to the slaughter. The phrase “of God” can be taken in two senses — in the sense that Jesus as man belonged to God because in his sacrifice he gave himself over totally in our name to the Father, and in the sense that it was God himself who provided Jesus, as Lamb, for the Sacrifice of the Cross. (cf. CCC 209)

81. I am confused about the word “Lord,” which is sometimes applied to God and sometimes to Jesus. Which is correct?

Both are correct. The Hebrew name for God is JAHVE. In the Greek Version of the Old Testament, the word was translated as KYRIOS and as such was accepted by the Christian Church in including the Old Testament as an integral part of the Christian Bible. In the New Testament, which came to be written totally in Greek, the risen Jesus is also referred to as KYRIOS.

Since Kyrios is translated into English as “Lord,” both God and Christ are called “Lord.” Since we believe that Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity and therefore true God, we have no problem with calling him Lord in the same sense as the term is used in the Old Testament. In addition to this, we call him Lord even as man since in reward for his obedience unto death, God has given him as man, dominion over all creation. Philippians 2:6-11 sums up the story of how Jesus through God became man and for our sake lived out his life in humble obedience unto death and was rewarded by the Father with resurrection and glory. The last verse reads: “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

82. In Acts 1:26, it says that the Apostles chose Matthias to replace Judas by casting lots. Isn't this sinful gambling?

In the first place, gambling is not necessarily sinful. In itself, it can be harmless play. It is sinful when it results in sins against justice or charity. In the case of the Apostles, casting lots was simply a practical method of choosing between two candidates of equal qualifications. Having prayed, they left the outcome to God who did not intervene directly, but accepted the human solution to the matter.

83. Did Lot's wife (Genesis 19:26) really turn into a pillar of salt?

Probably not. As was noted in talking earlier about Biblical interpretation (see question 67), one has to take into account the culture and literary style of the original author and the truth he intended to teach. The truth was that Lot's wife died at this time and her death was seen as punishment for not obeying

God's command. What may have happened could be something like this: in later times, the people knowing the locale of the wife's untimely death come to refer to a salt formation in the area as the site of her death. And the formation eventually comes to be called "Lot's wife." At this late date almost four thousand years after the event, we have no way of knowing whether this is the real explanation.

84. Were the Magi real people, or is the story in Matthew 2 merely symbolic?

There's no doubt about the symbolic meaning namely that the newborn Messiah was showing himself as Messiah not only to the Jews (represented by the shepherds) but also to the Gentiles (all non-Jews). Whether the story of the Magi (called "astrologers" in recent translations) has a basis in fact is still a subject of debate among Scripture scholars. (cf. CCC 528)

85. Why is there a complaint that the language of the Bible is sexist?

Some people are disturbed by the fact that English uses the single word "man" to refer both specifically to a male human person and also generically to a human person of either gender. In the same way, "men" can mean either a group of male human persons or a group of both male and female human persons. The criticism is that the use of "man" and "men," as well as the pronoun "he," tends to hide the presence of women. Rather than being a problem of sexism in the Bible, however, the basic problem arises from the limitations of the English language. Many languages have similar limitations, though some have separate words to refer to the generic human person, without implying any gender. Some people at times try to avoid using "man" or "men" in the generic sense by substituting "human

person,” “men and women,” or some other rephrasing, though it is not always possible to do this in English without considerable awkwardness.

More radical criticisms of the Bible object to the fact that it almost always portrays God in masculine terms as Lord or King or, most importantly, Father. Others contend that a religion that sees God as incarnate as a man disregards women and contributes to their oppression in society.

In response, we must remember that if we want to learn about God, who surpasses our understanding, we have to accept what God reveals to us and not attempt to fashion our own religion according to our own standards of political correctness.

86. What is the magisterium of the Church?

Magisterium” can be taken in two senses. It can mean “teaching power,” and it can mean the authority which legitimately exercises that teaching power. In reference to the Church, it is Catholic belief that Christ in uniting the Church to himself empowers it to share in his power as Teacher and that he has constituted the pope and bishops in the Church, the lawful successors of Peter and the other apostles, as the authoritative spokesmen of his teaching.

Since the “Magisterium” is frequently in the news these days, it may help to expand on this subject. Catholic belief can be summed up in the following points:

1. Christ gave his Church the commission and the authority to teach. “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I

have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

2. Christ identified the Church’s teaching mission with his own. “Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Luke 10:16).

3. Christ first promised and then sent the Holy Spirit to enlighten the Church and preserve it in fidelity to his teaching. “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate* to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.” “I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the holy Spirit, that the Father will send in my name — he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you”(John 14:16-17; 25-26) (*regarding “advocate,” see question 92 about the Paraclete).

Such was the promise. The actual coming of the Holy Spirit is described in the Pentecost event of Acts 2:1-13.

4. Christ chose Peter as the chief of the Apostles, the minister of unity among them and the principal pastor of all the faithful (lambs and sheep). “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

“Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32).

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than

these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’

“He then said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’

“He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’ ” (John 21:15-17).

5. Christ intended that the teaching power of the Church and the authority of its leaders to articulate the Church’s teaching would be passed on through succeeding generations of the faithful and the lawful successors of Peter and the other apostles.

As noted above in Matthew 28:18-20, he speaks of being with the Church “until the end of the age.” This surely implies existence for the Church and exercise of its teaching power beyond the generation of his own time. (cf. CCC 85)

87. What can I say to convince my daughter that it is wrong for her and her boyfriend to live together outside of marriage?

Such situations are so emotionally colored that they are rarely settled by rational arguments. Some kind of pastoral care and counseling is needed. But if your daughter is appreciative of spiritual values, it may help to remind her that for the religious person, marriage is a three person event — a woman, a man, and God. The woman and man who live together without marriage are right back to square one in Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve decide to leave God out of the picture. We all know the sad sequel to that. (cf. CCC 2353)

88. What is the significance of saying that Jesus is a priest “according to the order of Melchisedech”?

There are two Biblical references here: Genesis 14:17-20 and Hebrews 7. Melchisedech (in the Genesis account) was the Priest-King of the principality of Salem who met Abraham after a victorious battle and in Abraham’s behalf offered bread and wine as a thanksgiving sacrifice to God. The author of Hebrews poetically compares Christ to Melchisedech in that, like Melchisedech, he is not of the hereditary priestly line of Levi, he is both Priest and King, he is King of Salem (meaning “peace”), he could be called King of Righteousness (which is the translation of the old king’s name) and just as Melchisedech appears without mention of his birth or death, Jesus is eternal. Hebrews is a wonderfully rich and beautiful letter. Chapter 7 is only one of its jewels. (cf. CCC 1544)

89. I was shocked to read in a Protestant publication that Catholics are cannibals because they actually believe they eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood. How do I answer this?

It is true, of course, that we believe that we do indeed receive the risen Christ who is living and, therefore, “flesh and blood.” But he does not die in our sacramental Communion and his union with us is of an order totally different from the physical order of digestion. We hold that Christ is present in the Eucharistic bread and wine, but independent of the sensible qualities of the bread and wine. Our eating of what appears to be bread and drinking what appears to be wine are visible actions which signify the very real Communion (soul-union) which at that moment is taking place interiorly between ourselves and our risen Lord.

90. Where does the Bible speak about Michael waging war against Satan?

It is in Revelation 12:7-9. "Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it."

The immediate reference here is to the revolt of Satan against the appearance of the Messiah and the beginning of his redemptive mission. Jesus in his public life has several recorded encounters with Satan, and the Church is still in the battle. In the Revelation account, there may also be a reference to the revolt of the angels at the dawn of creation and the subsequent appearance of the fallen-angel, Satan, to Adam and Eve.

91. What is a parable?

A parable is a story of a real or imagined event used to illustrate a religious truth. An illustration of this is the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan, a story told to teach the lessons of compassion and mercy toward anyone in need, whether friend or stranger. Usually the parable is concerned with a single lesson, but sometimes it is extended into teaching several lessons. In this case it is called an allegory. The story of the Sower and the Seed (Matthew 13:3-9) is an allegory. It not only compares the word of God to a seed but goes on to teach the effect of its sowing on different types of persons.

The parable and allegory are very effective methods of instruction and it is easy to see why Jesus preferred to "teach in parables." One author has thought that Jesus used parables

not only for clarity and persuasion but also as a kind of mercy. The hearer who did not agree rarely objected to what Jesus was teaching, as he might have done in the case of cold argument. More often than not he simply walked away, but not without the story still in his mind. And who knows how often it was this story, quietly considered again and again, which eventually converted him?

92. The Holy Spirit is referred to in John 14:16 as another Advocate or Paraclete. What is a paraclete and who, other than the Holy Spirit, has this title?

Paraclete is a term which has a wealth of meanings. The paraclete is an advocate, defender, counselor, comforter, interpreter, exhorter, and mediator. In John 14:16, we find Jesus in his last discourse promising the Holy Spirit as Paraclete to the Apostles for the guidance of the Church. It is obvious that he refers to himself as one Paraclete and the Holy Spirit as the other. It could be noted in passing that this reference to two Paracletes or Mediators should give pause to those who interpret too narrowly the text of 1 Timothy 2:5 which explains that there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Jesus is, indeed, the sole mediator in the redeeming action of giving his life for the world, but now that we are in the time of receiving the graces merited for us, Jesus associates with himself other mediators, the Holy Spirit as co-equal with him, and then in a vastly subordinate degree and dependent upon him, all the redeemed who, as members of his body, share in his priestly office as Mediator.

93. What is “Parousia” and how do you pronounce the word?

The Greek word actually means “presence.” It is pronounced, according to Webster, as Par-u-SEE-a. The term was originally

used to speak of the triumphal arrival of a ruler. In the New Testament it is used in reference to the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, for example, in Matthew 24:3-4: “As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and said, ‘Tell us, when will this happen, and what sign will there be of your coming [parousia], and of the end of the age?’” (cf. CCC 101)

94. What is meant by the passion of Christ?

The word “Passion” is used here in the meaning of “suffering.” The reference is to all the painful experiences of Jesus’ last days: the betrayal, arrest, trials, abuse of the soldiers, denial by Peter, journey to Calvary, crucifixion, and death. (cf. CCC 609)

95. What are the Pastoral Letters?

They are the two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus. They are called pastoral because unlike Paul’s other letters, they are addressed to individual pastors rather than to whole Churches.

96. What is the difference between a presbyter and a priest?

Actually the English word “priest” is derived from the Greek word “presbyter,” which means “elder.” The term came to be used in the early Church to designate those consecrated ministers who were placed by the Apostles or their successors over Christian Communities. Their many functions were more or less those which today are exercised either by bishops or by priests.

Non-Catholics sometimes complain that in calling one’s ministers “priests,” we are allowing them to usurp the place of Christ in the Church. What needs to be understood is that the word “priest” as applied to Christ is not used in the same sense

when applied to his consecrated ministers. Christ is the one, essential priest of the New Testament, the new and only high priest. All the others whom we call “priests” are Christ’s ministers sharing in his priesthood in a special way, witnessing by their visible presence to his presence, which is no longer visible.

97. What is meant by the priesthood of the faithful?

As Jesus is the one essential Mediator and High Priest of the New Covenant, all those who are united with him in faith and baptism share in his priesthood, so that in him, with him, and through him they carry out his mission of reconciliation in the world. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree On the Ministry and Life of Priests (n. 2) explains this:

“The Lord Jesus ‘whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world’ (John 10:36) makes his whole Mystical body sharer in the anointing of the Spirit wherewith he has been anointed: for in that Body all the faithful are made a holy and kingly priesthood, they offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and they proclaim the virtues of him who has called them out of darkness into his admirable light. Therefore there is no such thing as a member that has not a share in the mission of the whole Body. Rather, every single member ought to reverence Jesus in his heart and by the spirit of prophecy give testimony of Jesus.”

The Council’s Dogmatic Constitution On the Church (n. 10) teaches that the Catholic Church makes an important distinction between the common priesthood of all the faithful and the priesthood of those who receive the consecration of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It says there is a difference here in essence and not simply in degree:

“Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the Eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity.” (cf. CCC 1547)

98. How does one go about looking up Bible citations?

A citation is a reference to a specific passage in the Bible. It consists of the name of the Book, and of the chapter and verse of the passage within that book. Often, the name of the Book is abbreviated as, for example, Genesis or Gn for Genesis. Bibles usually have a list of these abbreviations in their introductory pages. Hence, to find, for instance, the story of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, one might be given Genesis 3:1-24. This means: Book of Genesis, chapter 3, verses 1 to 24.

There is a difference in the names of some books as given in older Catholic Bibles and those printed more recently. The following table gives the old and new titles:

Old	New
Ecclesiasticus	Sirach
I Kings	I Samuel
II Kings	II Samuel
III Kings	I Kings
IV Kings	II Kings

99. What does the word “Rabboni” mean?

It is a form of the word “rabbi” which means teacher or master (in the sense of teacher). By changing the ending, one gave the word a note of appreciation and warmth, as if to say “Great Master” or “Beloved Master.”

100. There are cases in the Gospel where Jesus raised the dead to life. My question is how could people be brought back to life if they were already dead and judged? And if they were not judged, how could they be really dead?

In the matter of divine mysteries, God often does not give us an explanation. This is where faith comes into play — when we accept on God’s word what is revealed to us, even though we do not fully understand it. There is no doubt that the Gospel tells us of a real restoration of life in the case of the dead man of Naim (Luke 7: 17) and in the case of Lazarus (John 11:41-44). In the latter case, Mary was even concerned about the odor from a four-day-old corpse. So there was real death. And there was real restoration to life. We accept the facts because God reveals them, not because we can fully explain them.

It should be noted that this type of restoration to life is a kind of resuscitation. Those concerned are brought back to consciousness and power to continue their natural life span. The resurrection of Christ is totally different. His return to life was not a return to his life in time, but his entrance (as man) into eternal life.

101. My Adventist neighbors keep insisting that the Catholic Church has no right to change the Sabbath to Sunday. What can I say to them?

In his apostolic letter *The Lord's Day* (May 31, 1998), Pope John Paul II writes (n. 18):

“Because the Third Commandment depends upon the remembrance of God’s saving works and because Christians saw the definitive time inaugurated by Christ as a new beginning, they made the first day after the Sabbath a festive day, for that was the day on which the Lord rose from the dead. The paschal mystery of Christ is the full revelation of the mystery of the world’s origin, the climax of the history of salvation and the anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment of the world. What God accomplished in creation and wrought for his people in the exodus has found its fullest expression in Christ’s death and resurrection, though its definitive fulfillment will not come until the Parousia, when Christ returns in glory. In him, the ‘spiritual’ meaning of the Sabbath is fully realized, as Saint Gregory the Great declares: ‘For us, the true Sabbath is the person of our redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ.’ This is why the joy with which God, on humanity’s first Sabbath, contemplates all that was created from nothing, is now expressed in the joy with which Christ, on Easter Sunday, appeared to his disciples, bringing the gift of peace and the gift of the Spirit (cf. John 20:19-23). It was in the paschal mystery that humanity, and with it the whole creation, ‘groaning in birth pangs until now’ (Romans 8:22), came to know its new ‘exodus’ into the freedom of God’s children, who can cry out with Christ, ‘Abba, Father!’ (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). In the light of this mystery, the meaning of the Old Testament precept concerning the Lord’s Day is recovered, perfected and fully revealed in the glory which shines on the face of the risen Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6). We move from the

‘sabbath’ to the ‘first day after the Sabbath,’ from the seventh day to the first day: the dies Domini [the day of the Lord] becomes the dies Christi! [the day of Christ]”

Some people mistakenly think that the Sabbath (Saturday) was changed to Sunday in post-Apostolic times. But there is evidence of Sunday observance in the New Testament. Sunday is referred to as the First Day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 20:7) and the Lord’s Day (Rv 1:10). Reading Acts about life in the Early Church one finds the Christian converts from Judaism including the Apostles still culturally observing the Sabbath as well as Sunday. These same Apostles, however, relying on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declared the converts from Paganism exempt from Jewish religious customs. Besides exemption from circumcision and certain dietary laws, it would appear that they were not obliged to Sabbath observance. The holy day of the New Covenant puts primary emphasis on God’s triumph in Christ at the Resurrection. The same Apostolic Letter (nn. 21-30) gives more ample consideration to the importance and theological value of this development from observance of the Sabbath to celebration of the Lord’s resurrection on Sunday.

Ironically, those who insist that the Sabbath be celebrated on Saturday find themselves faced with a dilemma. Either they deny that Sunday observance dates from the church of the apostles, and so reject the Scriptural evidence in Acts; or they admit that Sunday observance was approved by the Apostles, and so find themselves, rather than Catholics, out of touch with our Christian roots. (cf. CCC 2175)

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“Faith seeks understanding”: it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The grace of faith opens “the eyes of your hearts” to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation.

– Catechism of the Catholic Church, 158.

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Pope St. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 5
Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time

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