

19. Catholic Living

“Religion has its origins in the depths of the soul. It can be understood only by those who are prepared to take the plunge”.

Christopher Dawson gave us a pearl of wisdom when he wrote these words. We have tried in this course to give the reader a clear picture of our religion. But we know that no book, no course of lessons, can by itself give anyone an adequate understanding of religion. We can tell you a whole lot of things about religion, but the only way to really understand it is to try it, to begin to live it.

That is a matter for the free response of the individual. God does not compel anyone to serve him. Nobody else has any right to force us to serve God either. It must be a free, voluntary response from us, based on personal conviction.

We must ask ourselves honestly if we believe that God has revealed himself to us through Christ, and if we believe that Christ calls us to love and serve God in the visible community of the Church. Catholics believe that this is so. They try to live accordingly.

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Religion and Life are one

Man must serve God and his neighbour in all departments of life. His life and religion should be one and the same thing. Housewives serve chiefly in looking after homes, employers and employees in their daily work, children and teachers at their lessons, monks and nuns in the prayers and works of their monasteries, bishops and priests in their daily ministrations to the people.

Every cog in the wheel counts in the smooth running of a piece of machinery. Each man has an important part to play in keeping the machinery of Society running smoothly. But men are more than cogs, and human life more than machinery. Each man must consciously and deliberately serve to the best of his ability and dedicate his life and work to God.

Recreation is also an important part of religion. A man must rest and refresh his mind and body if he is to continue to serve efficiently. He should develop his God-given powers in pursuits other than those of his work. Above all he must have time to help his family and find comfort and joy in the company of his loved ones and friends. God intends man to have joy in this life as well as in the life to come.

There are many practices which the Church encourages to enable Catholics to bring God into every department of their lives.

Prayer

The prayer life of a Catholic is partly public and partly private. As a member of the believing Christian community his public prayer life is his participation in the Church's liturgy.

The Mass is the centre of his public prayer. This is so important that he knows it would be a serious sin of negligence to omit it on Sundays or Holy Days without a good reason. The Holy Days are Christmas, New Year, Ascension of Christ, Assumption of Mary, and All Saints Day.

At Mass a Catholic is not just a spectator. He shares actively in offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice with the whole community under the leadership of the priest. The words of the prayers to say at Mass, and a knowledge of how to join to the fullest extent in the offering, are learned by experience. Newcomers to Mass are advised to go with a friend who will help them become familiar with the practical details.

Private Prayer

We have referred to private prayer in many places through this course of lessons.

"Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5, 17-18), says St. Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians. To help himself to do this the Christian should acquire habits of prayer at set times of the day.

The Sign of the Cross

The Catholic should begin his day by tracing on himself the Sign of the Cross, reminding himself of Christ's death and adoring the three Persons in one God. He touches the forehead, saying, "In the name of the Father," the breast, saying, "and of the Son," the left and right shoulder, saying, "and of the Holy Spirit," and he joins his hands, saying "Amen." This is done at the beginning of all prayer and at times when God's help is specially needed.

Morning Prayers

The morning has always been regarded as the best time for prayer. The Psalms frequently refer to morning praise. The day should begin with prayer. This is not a practice only for children. The best way of beginning the day, of course, is to go to Mass. Most people find this difficult because they have to hurry to work or school, but daily Mass is the most rewarding of pious practices.

Prayers through the day

Opportunity should be found for brief prayers at many points of the day. It is a Catholic custom to say a short prayer when passing a church, or, better still, to

call in and make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. It is an old custom to say the Angelus, morning, mid-day and evening. It is made up of the words of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, her reply and a request for her help. Many churches ring the Angelus bell to indicate the times for this prayer.

It is a very ancient custom to say grace before and after meals. There is something sacred about food, since it nourishes God's gift of life, and the family meal is a powerful bond of union among those who receive life from the same parents and live beneath the same roof.

Night Prayers

At the end of the day the Catholic should thank God for the blessings he has received that day and ask for protection during the night. He should examine his conscience and make an Act of Sorrow for sin.

Family Prayers

Members of a Christian family should spend some time in prayer together each day. Good parents know that they will not be able to hand on their faith to their children unless they make prayer a daily reality in the home. The Rosary is an ideal family prayer. Before each decade it is good to read a few sentences from the gospel relating to the event in question. In this way the Family Rosary becomes a simple form of Bible Service which everyone can follow.

Parents ought also to prepare the prayers and Bible readings of the Mass with their children before taking them to Church. They are encouraged to bring the children as a group to assist at the baptism of a new baby, to encourage the saying of grace before and after meals, and to have some religious pictures or other reminders of the presence of God in the home. To none more than to the Christian family do the words of Christ apply, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18: 20).

The Sacraments

We have explained in some detail during this course that the seven sacraments are very special instruments through which Christ gives us the new life of union with God, the life of sanctifying grace, and keeps that life active and vital within us. Holy Communion is in a unique way the divine food which nourishes the new life within us. Catholics receive Holy Communion frequently. We are encouraged to do so each time we are at Mass. (*See lesson 11*).

When Catholics are confined to their home permanently or for a long period, because of sickness, the priest in their parish brings Holy Communion to them in their home. To arrange this Catholics notify their priest when a member of the

family has a long or permanent illness. The Church also has a special sacrament, Anointing of the Sick, for those who are seriously ill. (See *lesson 12*).

Examination of Conscience

Frequent examination of conscience is a most valuable exercise for all who are trying to live devout Christian lives. It helps us to see how we are progressing in our efforts to love God and our neighbour. The following thoughts are helpful suggestions for such self examination:

- ↪ **Have I neglected prayer to God or lost my faith in him?**
- ↪ **Have I despaired at times, or presumed that I could live without God/**
- ↪ **What is holding me back from giving myself wholeheartedly to God?**
- ↪ **What do I do to deepen my knowledge of my religion? Do I read about my faith?**
- ↪ **Have I missed Mass deliberately on Sundays or Holy Days?**
- ↪ **Have I performed any act of self-denial on Fridays?**
- ↪ **Have I used God's name disrespectfully?**
- ↪ **What way have I offended in my particular state of the life? As a father and husband? As a wife and mother? As a child and student? As an employer and employee?**
- ↪ **Have I spoken kindly of others, or have I been uncharitable in my thoughts and speech about others? Gossip? Taking away another's good name?**
- ↪ **Have I been honest in my actions? Stealing? If so, have I made restitution? Did I waste or destroy the property of others?**
- ↪ **Have I been selfish at home to parents or dependants?**
- ↪ **Have I lied? Did I hurt others by my words or actions? Or did I intend to do so?**
- ↪ **Have I sinned by unchastity against my self or with others?**
- ↪ **Have I controlled my thoughts, desires, and feelings?**
- ↪ **Have I led others into sin by my bad example?**
- ↪ **What is my attitude to non-Christians? Do I pray for those without faith?**
- ↪ **How often do I think of the poor? How much do I give to the poor or to others needing help?**
- ↪ **Have I been proud or arrogant, spiteful or avenging?**
- ↪ **Have I gambled when I could not afford it?**
- ↪ **Have I been drunk or driven under the influence?**
- ↪ **When I suffer through sickness do I make myself a burden to others?**
- ↪ **Do I use my talents to help others, through social work or parish activities?**

Confession

It is necessary to go to Confession and be sincerely repentant if we fall into mortal sin. But even if we have no very serious sins it is good to confess our lesser sins frequently. Catholics are encouraged to confess once a month. Some do so more often. The sacrament of Confession not only takes away our sins, it also gives us grace and strength against human weakness and temptation. It gives an easy opportunity for personal spiritual direction and guidance. Priests are available in their churches for Confessions at published times every week. In addition any Catholic may ask a priest to hear his or her confession any time.

The Sacramentals

All the things man uses in his daily life should be dedicated to God. Man is made up of body as well as spirit, and needs to worship with words and actions as well as with his mind. He has found many ways of using things and performing actions to help him lift up mind and heart to his Creator. In the Sacraments which Christ himself gave to his Church as means of supernatural life, ordinary things such as bread, wine, oil and water are used. These things are signs of the life they give. There are other signs used in worship which because they have some resemblance to the Sacraments, are called Sacramentals.

In the Sacramentals water, light, candles, palms, ashes, statues and medallions are used. There are man-made signs accepted by the Church as occasions of blessing those who use them with faith. Their chief value comes from the Church's blessing and the faith of the one using them.

Blessings

To bless means to ask God's favours for a person or dedicate a thing to his service. Any Christian may ask for God's blessings on another, but only a priest can bless officially in the name of the Church. Those who are blessed, or use devoutly things which have been blessed, receive an increase of Christ's life, if they have faith. There are blessings for special occasions, such as a wedding, a pregnancy, a sickness, and blessings for things upon which men depend for life, such as crops, animals, fish, machinery and the home.

The Church blesses things used in divine worship and gives them a new spiritual character.

Holy Oils

On Holy Thursday each year the bishop blesses the oils which are to be used during the following year in the administration of the sacraments. The oils blessed are of three kinds---the oil of catechumens, chrism and the oil of the sick. Each of them is olive oil, but chrism is distinguished from the others by having balm or

balsam mixed with it. Each of the oils is blessed with a special form of prayer expressing the purpose for which it is to be used and what it signifies.

The oil of catechumens is used in the ceremonies connected with Baptism and Holy Order. The oil of the sick is for the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. Holy Chrism is used in Confirmation, the consecration of a bishop, Baptism, the consecration of a church and other solemn ceremonies.

When the newly blessed oils are obtained on Holy Thursday, the old ones are burned. The priest keeps the holy oils with reverent care, and the oil of the sick must always be readily available for sudden calls.

In the countries of the Orient and in southern Europe, olive oil has always been a necessity of daily life, much more than with us. It enters into the preparation of food; it is used as a remedy, internally and externally; in past centuries it was the chief means of providing light; it was employed in ancient times by the athletes of the Olympic games to give suppleness and strength to their muscles. These considerations help us to see the symbolic meaning of the use of oil by the Church in her ceremonies ---spiritual nourishment, cure for our spiritual ailments, diffusion of the light of grace and the warmth of love in our souls, strength in the practice of our faith and in the fight against temptation.

It is of interest to note that the use of oil in religious functions was not unknown to the Jews. The Old testament makes mention of its use in many instances, such as the consecration of priests and kings, as well as in sacrifices, legal purifications and the consecration of altars.

Holy Water

Water is blessed by a priest who reads the official prayers of the Church over it, asking God to send his angels to ward off evil from the persons and places sprinkled with it. A dish of this Holy Water is placed at the door of the church and the people, on entering, dip their finger-tips into it and trace on themselves the Sign of the Cross.

Blessed Candles

Light has always played an important part in religious worship. It is a natural sign of life and joy, for without it Nature would be cheerless and dead. Indeed it is a natural sign of God himself. Many lights, and in particular the seven-branched candlestick, burned before the Holy Place in the Temple was ablaze with lamps representing God, the light of Israel. When Christ was first brought to the Temple by Mary and Joseph the holy man Simeon greeted him as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel" (Luke 2, 32). Jesus himself declared: "I am the light of the world" (John 8, 12). In the Book of Revelation he is

called "he who walks among the seven golden lampstands" (Rev. 2, 1) a reference to the seven-branched candlestick in the Holy Place. The Paschal candle at Easter is a symbol of Christ risen from the dead.

Candles and lamps are used in worship also to add splendour to the occasion and give honour to God and his ministers. On the 2nd February, Candlemas Day, the Church recalls how Mary brought Christ to the Temple. Candles to be used at Mass throughout the year are blessed on this day. The people also burn unblest candles before statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, as a small token of faith and love.

Palms

The leaves or branches of palm trees are blessed on Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, and are carried in procession. This recalls the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem shortly before his death, when the people strewed palm branches in his path and the children chanted the words from the psalm: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21, 9). Small pieces of palms are given to the people which they take home and keep till the following year.

Ashes

On the first day of Lent, the six weeks of penance in preparation for Easter, the Church reminds the people of the shortness of life on earth and the need to prepare for death. Some palms from the previous year are burned and their ashes are blessed. The priest makes the Sign of the Cross with the blessed ashes on the foreheads of the people, saying: "Remember man, you will return to dust." (P5, Prayer of the Roman Missal).

Medals

The early Christians used to make small discs of metal bearing images of Christ, his Mother, or patron saints, usually as souvenirs of Baptism, First Communion or Confirmation. In the Middle Ages such discs were tokens that the wearers had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome or some shrine such as that of St. Thomas a Becket at Canterbury.

Nowadays medals are blessed by a priest and worn by the people as a token of faith and love of Christ and his saints, or as a reminder of some point of Catholic teaching. Medals are not lucky charms to ward off evil, although those who wear them pray for the protection of Christ and his saints. The prayers said when the medals are blessed indicate their purpose. For example, at the blessing of a medal of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the priest says: "Almighty and merciful God . . . bless this medal that he who thinks of it and wears it with devotion may

be protected by Mary and receive mercy from you, through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Incense

This is a powdered resin which, when burned, gives off a fragrant smoke. It was used in ancient times, the smoke being considered as symbolical of prayer rising up to God. It was burned every day in the Temple as a sacrifice. Zechariah was offering it when the Angel Gabriel told him that he was to be the father of John the Baptist. The second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel tells how wise men from the East came to the stable at Bethlehem offering gold, incense and myrrh to the child Jesus, gifts given to kings in olden times.

The Church uses incense to give honour to God. It is sprinkled on burning charcoal in a metal container, called a thurible, which is carried suspended on chains. The fragrant smoke is a symbol of the prayers of the Church and of the saints rising up unceasingly before God.

Occasional Services

The central act of worship of the Church is the Mass, but there are other services, usually in the evening, designed to help the people to pray and think about the truths of their religion. We have already mentioned Benediction in lesson 11.

Bible Services

The term *Bible Service* is usually given to any public prayer meeting which centers around the reading of passages from the Bible. Selected passages from the Bible are read and explained at these meetings so that we may meditate on them and apply them to our own lives. This reading and meditation is interspersed with prayers and hymns.

The Second Vatican Council says: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, because from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers the bread of life to the faithful." (Const. On revelation. Ch. 6).

Stations of the Cross

From very early times pilgrims in Jerusalem walked the road trodden by Christ bearing his Cross and stopped at certain traditional spots, or "stations," to meditate on the incidents of Christ's suffering and death. In the Middle Ages those who could not go to Jerusalem made this journey in spirit, pausing to pray before pictures or statues hung round the church. These depict fourteen incidents of the Way of the Cross, most of which are recorded in the Gospel, but some of which are pious traditions. The people, either privately or under the lead of the priest, say suitable prayers at these fourteen halting places and re-live Christ's

terrible journey. The Stations of the Cross are a suitable devotion for the time of Lent, when the Church prepares for Easter by penance and meditation on the suffering of Christ.

The Rosary

This is a meditation on the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection, made in company with Mary his mother. Beads are used to measure the time spent in meditation on each event. The Lord's Prayer, ten Hail Mary's and an invocation to the Blessed Trinity are recited as the person praying dwells on each event. The Rosary is divided into three parts, one concerned with the five joyful, one with the five sorrowful, and one with the five glorious events or "mysteries" of Christ's birth, infancy, death, resurrection and glory in heaven.

Missions

About once every three years there is a mission in the parish. This is a course of special sermons and pious exercises conducted by priests with a special "mission" from the bishop. It is time of special effort in which the pious strengthen their fervour, those who have grown careless renew it, and some who have fallen away return to the practice of their religion.

Pilgrimages

A pilgrimage is a journey to a spot made sacred by Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary or one of the saints. The chief places of pilgrimage have always been the Holy Land, where Christ lived and died, and Rome, where are the tombs of Sts. Peter and Paul.

Lourdes

Over the past 100 years the town of Lourdes at the foot of the Pyrenees in the south of France has become one of the world's greatest places of pilgrimage. More than two million people go there every year to pray. A pilgrimage goes there from Australia nearly every year.

Lourdes was an obscure village until the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared there to fourteen year old St. Bernadette Soubirous eighteen times between February 11th and July 16th in the year 1858. After asking for greater earnestness in prayer and repentance Our Lady directed Bernadette to wash and drink at a spring which came up out of the dry ground when she told Bernadette to dig with her hands. The water from this spring flows at the rate of 32,000 gallons a day. It is used for the baths at Lourdes and is taken away by pilgrims from all over the world.

On February 27th and March 2nd, 1858 Our Lady instructed Bernadette to have a chapel built near the grotto and have people come there in procession. On March 25th, 1858 she told her in the dialect of Lourdes, "*I am the Immaculate*

Conception". The Catholic belief in the Immaculate Conception had been publicly defined by Pope Pius IX less than four years earlier.

Bernadette later became a nun at Nevers. She died in 1879, and was declared a canonized saint in 1933.

There are now three very large churches for the pilgrims at Lourdes. Mass is offered continuously at the grotto in the open air during the summer and autumn months, and the Blessed Sacrament is carried in procession each afternoon, and the sick are blessed.

Many miraculous cures take place at Lourdes. Thousands of invalids are among the pilgrims each year. A Medical Bureau was set up there in 1882 to investigate the thousands of cures which appear to be miraculous. Cancer, tuberculosis and total blindness are among the fifty-eight cures declared miraculous by the International Medical Commission in Paris and by the Church authorities. Many interesting books have been written about Lourdes.

Processions

It is an instinct in men to walk in processions to demonstrate publicly what they believe, or to pay honour to the great. Religious processions are public professions of belief in God and are acts of worship. Catholics walk round the church, or through the streets, before the Blessed Sacrament carried by a priest beneath a canopy. They bear religious banners, sing hymns and recite prayers. Many towns and parishes in Europe have public processions in honour of their patron saints, and each year in the month of May there is (in most parishes) a procession in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Thus all human emotions and actions, and all the things used in everyday life, may be dedicated to the service of God, and the Church encourages many practices which help men to lift up mind and heart to him

THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

The Catholic religion centers on Jesus Christ, and the chief way in which the Church adores God is in the sacrifice of the Mass. But the most important aspect of Christ is his love of man. The human heart has always been regarded as the seat and symbol of love. The Church has long encouraged a devotion to the heart of Christ as the symbol of his love.

This devotion is based on an incident of the Crucifixion described in the nineteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. One of the Roman soldiers pierced the side of Christ with a lance to make sure that he was really dead, and blood and

water flowed from the wound. Christians meditated with tender sorrow on the pierced heart of Jesus, whose love for men was so great that he gave the last drop of his blood to save them. Monks and nuns, such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux and the English mystic Julian of Norwich, meditated often on the wounded heart and had remarkable personal experiences of the love of Christ. Learned theologians, such as St. John Eudes, wrote books explaining how, in adoring the Sacred Heart, men adored Christ himself, God-made-man, with particular reference to his love for ungrateful man.

This devotion became widespread mainly through a France nun of the seventeenth century, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. She described how, in prayer, she had a vision of Jesus. In her vision she saw his wounded heart, on fire with love. He said: "Behold this heart which has loved men so much and has received such little love in return." She painted a picture of the heart as she saw it, with the wound of the lance in its side, a crown of thorns about it, a cross above it and flames surrounding it. This image has been reproduced all over the world. Devotion to the Sacred Heart spread rapidly, and now in most Catholic churches and many homes there is an image of Christ pointing to the heart visible in his breast. The devotion to the sacred Heart has been accepted officially and encouraged by the Church, and there is a Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, celebrated on the eighth day after the great Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, Corpus Christ.

The Catholic religion, then, embraces the whole of life. The Church provides opportunity for her children to bring prayer and pious practices into the whole of the day. Catholic prayer books contain many prayers and devotions. The following are some simple prayers commonly said morning, noon and evening.

MORNING PRAYER

O God, we set about our tasks today with a surer tread, because of him who served in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth; we set about our dealings with other people with a new expectancy, because of the glorious thing he made of living. And when our work is done, and our life spent, we shall not be afraid of death, because we know we shall enter its mystery with him --- and in expectation of the larger life he has promised us.

*And with this assurance, our horizons are immensely widened!
We give you praise, now and forever! Amen.*

✠ *Our Father*

✠ *Hail Mary*.....

✠ *Glory be to the Father.....*

PRAYER DURING THE DAY (Scripture Reflection)

"This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:

Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with utter fullness of God.

Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen."

(Ephesians: 3: 14-21)

NIGHT PRAYER (Scripture Reflection)

"Before faith came, we were allowed no freedom by the Law; we were being looked after till faith was revealed. The Law was to be our guardian until the Christ came and we could be justified by faith. Now that that time has come we are no longer under that guardian, and you are, all of you, sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Merely by belonging to Christ you are the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised."

(Galatians: 3: 23-29)

✠ *Examination of conscience*
✠ *Act of sorrow.*

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POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you think it is necessary to *live* a religion before one can understand it properly? Give some reasons for your opinion.
2. Many devotional practices are helpful to some people but not to others. What practices help you to pray better: set prayers? Bible readings? Rosary? Family prayers/ spontaneous prayer? Etc?
3. suggest thoughts for an examination of conscience. How does self examination help us to be better Christians?
4. Compose a simple prayer that you would teach your own child to say at bed time.
5. Some people say they prefer to pray alone. Why is it necessary to pray also with others?
6. How much do you know about the life of your patron saint?