

WHAT EVERY
CATHOLIC
SHOULD KNOW

BY RICHARD BENNETT



What Every Catholic Should Know

by former priest
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Every good Catholic wants to please God in this present life and, when life on earth is over, hopes to live with Him forever. It's a noble goal based on their personal beliefs about God and how they seek to know Him.

But noble intentions and personal beliefs about God don't guarantee results—or eternal life. I urge you to do what I did after 22 years as a Dominican priest—make sure your beliefs have a solid foundation in the Bible. These questions will help you do that.

Whose word is truth?

The Catholic Church teaches...

The Pope's word is truth.

"The Supreme Pontiff, in virtue of his office, possesses infallible teaching authority..." (Canon 749*).

*All Catholic canons quoted are from the Post Vatican Council II *Code of Canon Law*, published by the authority of Pope John Paul II, 1983. Bible quotes: *The New American Bible for Catholics*.

The Bible teaches...

Every word of God is true.

Jesus prayed to God His Father, "Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Jesus said, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Holy Bible stands alone as a God-breathed book. Christ Himself warned that to elevate other writings and traditions to the level of God's words is to "nullify the word of God in favor of your traditions that you have handed on" (Mark 7:13).

Should we have sacred images?

The Catholic Church teaches...

Yes, we can have images.

"The practice of displaying *sacred images* in the churches for the *veneration* of the faithful is to remain in force..." (Canon 1188).

The Bible teaches...

No, we are not even to make sacred images!

"You shall not carve idols for yourselves...you shall not bow down before them or worship them" (Exodus 20:4-5). Yet the Roman Catholic Church encourages "veneration," the act of bowing down to sacred images, which the Pope himself does.

Is the sacrifice of the cross to be continually offered?

The Catholic Church says...

Yes, it is.

"Remembering that the work of redemption is continually accomplished in the mystery of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, priests are to celebrate frequently..." (Canon 904).

The Bible says...

One Person offered one sacrifice once for all and is now seated in glory.

"When Jesus had taken the wine, He said 'It is finished.' And bowing His head, He handed over the spirit" (John 19:30). "Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But this one [Jesus Christ] offered one sacrifice for sins, and took His seat forever at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:11-12).

Is there a need for priests?

The Catholic Church says...

Priests are necessary.

"They [the priests] are in fact sharers of the priesthood of Christ Himself...to celebrate divine worship and sanctify the people" (Canon 835).

The Bible says...

All believers are part of the royal priesthood to bring praise to God and to serve Him faithfully.

"You are...a royal priesthood...that you may announce the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Every believer has direct access to God and needs no intermediary but Jesus Christ, our High Priest.

"There is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, Himself human, who gave Himself as ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Does baptism save?

The Catholic Church teaches...

Salvation begins at baptism.

"Baptism, the gate to the sacraments, is necessary for salvation in fact or at least in intention, by which men and women are freed from their sins, are reborn as children of God, and conformed to Christ..." (Canon 849).

The Bible teaches...

Faith in Christ alone will save you, not your good works!

The work of reconciliation was completely finished by Jesus Christ when He died on the cross and rose again. Nothing we add to what God the Son has already done could merit God's favor.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; *it is not from works*, so no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"This is the *work of God*, that you believe in the one [Jesus] whom He [God] sent" (John 6:29).

"But if by grace, it is *no longer because of works*, otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6).

How then can we be saved?

The Bible says...

Recognize that by nature you are a sinner and unrighteous.

"We are all sinful [before God]; all of us have become like unclean men, all our good deeds are like polluted rags" (Isaiah 64:4-5). "More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Admit that you are separated from God because of your sins.

As a result, we are spiritually dead, separated from God, and condemned forever: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a). There is nothing of merit in ourselves that could ever help earn our salvation.

Acknowledge your need for a substitute.

Once and for all time Christ took the death penalty for our sins. "[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His body upon the cross" (1 Peter 2:24). He must be believed in as your righteous substitute or you cannot be saved.

Cry out to God for His free gift of salvation.

"All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24). If you are convinced that salvation is only through trusting in Christ's substitutionary death in your place—based solely on what the Bible says—express your heartfelt belief directly to God. "This is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11).

Then, having received the gift of eternal life, live your life for God in praise and thanksgiving.

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