What Is Faith?

Faith has many meanings. It is a rich, inexhaustible concept which describes how we relate to the world, to other people, and to God.

Here are several descriptions of faith. Those in the first column could apply to any human relationship; those in the second more accurately refer to our relationship with God.

Rank each description according to how well you think it captures what faith is about. Then, using your favorite descriptions, compose your own definition of faith.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith — General Meaning</th>
<th>Faith—Religious Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ Faith is believing what you know “ain’t so.”</td>
<td>___ Faith is allowing God to care for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Faith is a blind leap into the unknown.</td>
<td>___ Faith is saying “yes” to God’s invitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Faith is trusting in another.</td>
<td>___ Faith is a journey to God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Faith is taking a risk.</td>
<td>___ Faith is accepting Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Faith is admitting there are questions to ask.</td>
<td>___ Faith is responding to God’s presence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Faith is saying “yes” to life.</td>
<td>___ “What is faith except to believe what you do not see?” —St Augustine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your personal definition of faith:

Faith is ____________________________ .
Catholic Beliefs Survey

Here is a list of some of the most important beliefs held by Catholics. As you begin this course on Catholic faith, where do you stand on each of these? Decide by blackening the circle in the appropriate column.

1— I firmly believe this.
2— I believe this.
3— I am not sure if I believe this.
4— I need to know more about this topic before I can say whether or not I believe it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. God is one.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. God has made all that is seen and unseen.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jesus Christ is God. He lived as a man, suffered, and died for our sins, and rose to glory.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Jesus Christ lives among us now.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit whose power can be experienced in our daily lives.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. God is a Trinity of love.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Jesus Christ founded the Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The Holy Spirit guides the church through the pope and the bishops in communion with him.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The church has the right and the duty to teach in the areas of faith and morals.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The Bible is the inspired word of God.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Every Catholic has the duty to read and study the Bible.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. There are seven sacraments.

- *Baptism* unites Catholics to the body of Christ.
- *Reconciliation* celebrates God’s forgiveness.
- I can receive the risen Lord in *eucharist*.
- *Marriage* is a unique way to experience the life of Christ.

14. The greatest commandment is to love God above everything.

15. The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves.

16. Prayer should play an important role in a Catholic’s life.

17. Every Catholic must serve others, especially the poor and outcast.

18. Every Catholic must share the gospel with others.

19. Every Catholic must honor Mary in a special way and give respect to the saints.

20. Every Catholic must seek guidance from the church in matters of morality.

21. Learning about our Catholic faith is a life-long obligation.

22. There is an afterlife.

23. The belief I am most sure about is: ____________________________________________

24. I believe this because: _______________________________________________________

25. The topic I most want to learn about in this course is:
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Atheists, Agnostics, “Practical Atheists”

Atheists. However few, there are atheists who deny God’s existence. Their reasons vary. Some claim if there were a God, we could prove God’s existence beyond a shadow of a doubt. Because we cannot do so to everyone’s satisfaction, they deny that there is a God. Others—atheistic humanists—maintain that belief in God degrades what it means to be human. For them, intelligent humans are the peak of the evolving universe and God is an idea dreamed up by those in power to keep the ordinary folk in line.

Still other atheists claim that it is impossible to reconcile the notion of God with the evil in the world. Their question has to do with how a powerful being could possibly tolerate the immense evils of the world. Since they cannot answer this question, they deny that any Ultimate Being exists. Also, atheistic materialists (like Karl Marx) deny the existence of any spiritual reality. They only believe in what they can see, taste, touch, smell, or hear. The philosophy spawned by Marx—atheistic communism—enslaved millions of people during the twentieth century.

Agnostics. The cousins of the atheists are agnostics. Their name comes from the Greek for “don’t know.” They claim that we cannot know for sure if there is a God or not. For them, “God’s existence makes no practical difference in their lives. Though they claim not to take a stand on the issue, in reality they have decided not to commit themselves to God and live under divine sovereignty. Someone once amusingly said of agnostics that they pray like this: “Oh God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul.”

Practical atheists. Related to atheists and agnostics, practical atheists are self-proclaimed believers who claim to believe in God yet are indifferent to spiritual realities.

*discuss*

1. Think of examples of recent films you have seen where characters hold one or another of these positions.
2. Which do you think is a greater threat to Christian belief: agnosticism or practical atheism? Explain.
God in Your Life

Your own personal experience can teach you much about God. Reflect on the following topics and then see if you can come up with a concept of God that your experience reveals. Some examples are given for each category. Circle the ones that apply or write your own.

1. Briefly describe something you do that you enjoy very much:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What does this experience reveal to you about God?

God is . . .

joy   happiness   freedom _________________________________________________.

2. Briefly describe someone you know personally whom you respect.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

This person reveals that God is . . .

loving    generous    sensitive ______________________________________________.

3. Briefly describe a scene from nature that fills you with wonder:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

This scene reveals that God is . . .

awesome   immense   beautiful ____________________________________________.

As a class, share an experience of any of the following which may have revealed to you something about God:

a. events or people
b. a Bible reading
c. personal prayer
d. something in creation (rainbow, sunset), a newborn baby, the precision of mathematical formulas
e. the reality of love shown in a kiss or an embrace

Getting to Know Jesus

People reveal themselves in both actions and words. Here are four different scenes, one from each gospel, that help reveal more about the human Jesus. Read each passage. Summarize what the scenes reveal about Jesus.

Matthew 21:12–17
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Mark 5:25–34
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Luke 7:36–50
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

John 11:17–44
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Studying a Parable of Jesus

A parable is a simple, down-to-earth story with an unexpected twist. Jesus used parables to help present the good news of God’s salvation. His parables also challenge you to hear the gospel in a new and fresh way.

Here is a list of some of Jesus’ parables. Choose one and complete the following study guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parable</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talents (Mt 25:14–30)</td>
<td>Pharissee and Tax Collector (Lk 18:9–14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11–32)</td>
<td>Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merciless Official (Mt 18:21–35)</td>
<td>Tenants (Mk 12:1–12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wily Manager (Lk 16:1–8)</td>
<td>Wedding Banquet (Lk 14:16–24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16)</td>
<td>Weeds (Mt 13:24–30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed (Mk 4:1–20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describe the setting:____________________________________________________________

To whom is the parable addressed?______________________________________________

Did people understand the parable?____________

Explain their reaction to it:______________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Explain the meaning of the parable as you understand it:

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

What does the message of the parable mean to your own life?

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Give the parable another title:__________________________________________________

Rewrite the parable. Use a modern setting, but preserve its message and meaning.

Values and Jesus

Rank the following items (1–11) by how much time you spend thinking about them and how important they are to you.

___ your relationship to members of the opposite sex
___ your future
___ your popularity
___ how others treat you
___ mistakes you have made
___ your relationship with God
___ your relationship with your parents
___ money
___ your relationship with your friends
___ your success of failure in school, sports or other activities
___ your personal appearance

What Jesus ranked as important is contained in his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5—7. Read the text from scripture. Then evaluate each item above to see which would be important to Jesus.

discuss

1. What is of most value to Jesus?
2. In light of Jesus’ teaching, how would you rank the items on the list?
3. What are some societal pressures that keep us from following Jesus’ teaching?
Building up the Church

You can help build up the church by using your own special gifts. What are your personal “body-building” gifts? How are you special? Here is a list of nine Christian virtues. Check three that are most often present in your life. Then respond to the statement that follows.

___ Prudent (You “look before you leap.”)
___ Honest (You are not deceitful.)
___ Dependable (People can count on you.)
___ Patient (You don’t demand perfection in others.)
___ Forgiving (You don’t hold grudges.)
___ Empathetic (You can “feel for” another.)
___ Loyal (You stand by your friends.)
___ Helpful (You contribute time and effort when a job needs to be done.)
___ Humble (You praise others, yet you are not boastful.)

Add two other virtues that you believe are essential to building up a community. Describe each. Check them if they apply to you.

___ _______________ ( )
___ _______________ ( )

Describe a time when you felt you accomplished work for God and the church.
You Are the Living Church

You, as a member of the church, are an active reminder of Jesus’ presence in the world. With a small group, complete the following activity to demonstrate your commitment to the work of Christ. Do these steps in order:

A. Newspaper. Examine articles in the local newspaper to help determine the most pressing social needs in your community.

B. Priorities. Discuss and then list what your group perceives to be the three most critical issues.

C. Research. Select one of the issues and find out what, if anything, the church teaches about it. Consult the Bible, biblical dictionaries and commentaries, catechisms, the Documents of Vatican II, the New Catholic Encyclopedia, and articles from recent Catholic magazines and journals. Use the Catholic Periodical and Literature Index to help you locate specific articles.

D. Further Research. Determine what is already being done in your local area to solve the problem associated with your group’s issue. You might research the efforts of local governmental agencies and charitable organizations.

E. Specific Action. Discuss what action your group could take on this issue.

F. Christian Witness. Share each of the results of the preceding steps with the class. Use a chart to help with your presentation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Issue/Problem</th>
<th>Church Teaching</th>
<th>What is Being Done Now? By Whom?</th>
<th>What We Can Do to Help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Church Organization

Like any institution, the church is organized so it can accomplish its mission. Listed below are the various designations of the church’s organizational structure. Choose one designation and prepare a report based on the questions asked.

The pope is the head of the church. He is elected by the cardinals in a closed session. He is the supreme teacher, lawgiver, and shepherd who oversees the work of the church.

- Detail the election process for a pope.
- What is the Roman Curia? How does it help the pope do his work?
- Prepare a short biography of one of the twentieth-century popes.

Bishops are appointed by the pope, usually after consultation. They are the chief teachers and lawgivers in a diocese. They confer the sacraments of confirmation and holy orders. Cardinals are bishops who have been given the special task of electing a new pope.

- What are some characteristics of a good bishop?
- What is a deanery? a diocese? an archdiocese?
- Who is/are the bishop(s) in your diocese?
- List the names of the cardinals in the United States. (Consult a recent Catholic Almanac.)

Pastors are appointed by the bishop with help from a diocesan personnel board. The pastor is the chief administrator of a parish.

- What are some characteristics of a good pastor?
- Interview a pastor of a local parish. Ask him to share the greatest needs, challenges, and rewards of his job.
Law and Morality

It is impossible to create civil laws to regulate every aspect of human behavior. Yet society recognizes the need to pass some laws for the sake of the common good.

Below is a list of activities. First, place an X in Column A by the activities you think are morally wrong. Second, for those items you’ve marked, decide whether there should be civil laws to regulate those activities. If you think yes, then mark an X in Column B. Finally, go back over the items you marked as morally wrong and rank them from the most important (1) to the least important (8) as a moral issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Engaging in homosexual activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Selling “recreational” drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Underage drinking of alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prostitution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Selling pornography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Performing abortions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Euthanasia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tax avoidance schemes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Whose responsibility is it to determine the morality of these and other issues in society?

2. How can you respond to the claim that society is forcing its morality on others by passing laws to regulate the actions of individuals?
Case Studies

A. Mortal Sins: Yes or No?

Check any of the following sins which, in your judgment, involve serious matter and would be considered mortally sinful if engaged in with consent of the will and knowledge. Discuss reasons for your choices.

- ___ fornication (pre-marital sexual intercourse)
- ___ using obscene language
- ___ refusing to befriend a lonely classmate
- ___ disobeying one’s parents
- ___ getting intoxicated on alcohol or drugs
- ___ failing to help the poor if able to do so
- ___ teasing a handicapped child
- ___ using a fake ID to purchase alcohol
- ___ having an abortion
- ___ being jealous of a classmate’s achievements

Discuss

What other information would you need to know about each sin in order to judge its seriousness? What is one example of any new information that would change your initial decision?

B. Moral Decision-Making

How can the moral decision-making procedure (pp. 150-153 of the text) help you to decide how to respond to the following questions?

1. Should you leave the scene of a minor accident in a parking lot when there are no witnesses?
2. Should you read pornographic literature?
3. Should you attend Sunday Mass when you don’t want to?
4. Should you reveal a secret you accidentally overheard?
5. Should you tell a friend’s parents that he or she is using drugs?
6. Should you cheat when you realize you studied the wrong material for a test?
7. Should you open a side door at the theatre so a friend can sneak into the movie without paying?

Social Justice: Scriptural Background

Listed below are some biblical teachings on social justice. Read each Old and New Testament passage and match them with the short summaries provided.

**Old Testament**

1. Love your neighbor as yourself.
2. Be generous to the needy.
3. Be just to orphans and widows and share with the stranger.
4. Feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked.
5. Make justice your aim.
6. Mere lip service is not enough.
   
   a. Is 58:6–7  
   b. Dt 15:11  
   c. Is 1:16–17  
   d. Lv 19:18  
   e. Is 29:13–14  
   f. Dt 10:17–19

**New Testament**

7. All are one in Jesus Christ.
8. Everyone is your neighbor.
9. Responding to the needs of your least brothers and sisters is responding to Jesus.
10. Faith without works is lifeless.
11. Love as Jesus has loved you.
12. To follow Jesus means to serve the needs of all.

   g. Mt 20:24–28  
   h. Lk 10:25–37  
   i. Jas 2:14–17  
   j. Gal 3:28  
   k. Jn 15:12  
   l. Mt 25:31–46

Committed to Justice

Read the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25–37. Then, update the parable by putting yourself in it. Consider the following scenario. Then write the answers to the questions in your journal.

You are driving alone at night on a deserted road. You notice a one-car accident victim lying on the side of the road. The person is of another race than you.

1. Should you stop and help? If not, what should you do?
2. What might happen if you stop?
3. What if the person died because you did not stop? Would you be responsible in any way for the person’s death?
4. Does Jesus require us to do heroic things to be his followers?
5. Who is your neighbor?
6. What are some other ways you can apply the message of the Good Samaritan to your life at school? at work? at home?

Baker’s Dozen on War and Peace

Directions. Mark each of the following statements using these notations: A if you agree, D if you disagree, and N if you have no opinion. Then discuss the questions that follow.

___ 1. Another world war would mean a nuclear war.

___ 2. We are all citizens of the world.

___ 3. War is the only way to settle international disputes.

___ 4. Military strength is the best guarantee of peace.

___ 5. War heroes are more popular than peace heroes.

___ 6. A peace advocate is unpatriotic.

___ 7. Wars are necessary to control the population.

___ 8. The United States is a significant peace-keeping force in the world.

___ 9. Strong countries must come to the aid of weak countries in the interest of peace.

___ 10. It is just as easy to train young people to be peacemakers as it is to train them for the military service.

___ 11. There have always been wars, and there will always be wars.

___ 12. All wars are immoral.

___ 13. Excessive government spending on the military is a sin against the poor.

-discuss-

1. Tally the responses of the class. Are you surprised by any of the results? Explain.

2. Why did you answer as you did? How might you use historical evidence to support your answers?

3. How do your responses differ from how your parents would respond? Why?

4. What should be a Christian response to each item? Explain.

**Sacraments and the Values of Jesus**

This chart lists the seven sacraments and a central value of each. Complete the chart by doing the following:

1. Find an action or teaching of Jesus in the gospels that supports each value. List the chapter and verse reference for each. Be prepared to support your choice.

2. Write a few words to remind yourself of a time when someone exemplified this value for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sacrament</th>
<th>Central Value</th>
<th>Gospel Passage</th>
<th>Personal Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptism</td>
<td>new life; celebration of Christian community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation</td>
<td>strength and growth; celebration of gifts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eucharist</td>
<td>ongoing nourishment; celebration of unity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>forgiveness and reunion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anointing of Sick</td>
<td>health: both physical and spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrimony</td>
<td>love, family life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Orders</td>
<td>service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. What are three significant signs of grace—God’s love—in your life?

2. Discuss the meaning of these sacramental symbols: water, a ring, bread, wine, laying on hands (touch).
The Eucharist

A. *What does the eucharist mean to you?* Here are some Catholic beliefs about the eucharist. Mark an **A** if you agree with the statement, a **D** if you disagree and a **?** if you are not sure.

____ 1. The eucharist is a great action of love.

____ 2. The eucharist makes me holy.

____ 3. The eucharist is a symbol of unity with fellow Catholics.

____ 4. The eucharist reminds me to love others.

____ 5. The best way to worship God is through the eucharist.

Discuss reasons for your choices.

B. *Mass attendance.* The following are some reasons people give for not going to Mass. Rank them from 1 (the most often given) to 8 (the reason least often given).

____ 1. My parents don’t go. Why should I?

____ 2. My friends don’t go. Why should I?

____ 3. I don’t get anything out of it.

____ 4. Mass is boring.

____ 5. I pray better alone.

____ 6. The church can’t tell me how I should pray.

____ 7. There are too many hypocrites there.

____ 8. Other:

________________________________________________________________

Reflection: Share and discuss your responses.

1. For you, what is the most important reason to go to Mass?

2. Imagine the government banned Catholic Masses. What would your reaction be?

3. What could you say to change the mind of a friend who told you she didn’t go to Mass because it was too boring and there were too many hypocrites there?

Christian Marriage

Here is a list of some qualities that are desirable for a successful Christian marriage. Check two which you can work on now:

____ patience             ____ love of children
____ forgiveness          ____ friendship skills
____ self-denial           ____ spirit of sacrifice
____ delayed gratification ____ thoughtfulness of others
____ sense of humor        ____ ability to enjoy the simple things of life
____ willingness to share
____ other: _______________________________________________________

1. How can each of the qualities help to make a lasting, happy marriage?

2. Interview a happily married Catholic couple. Ask each person what they think are essential traits for a successful marriage.

Sacrifice. In Luke 9:23–25 Jesus talks about “taking up a cross to follow me.” In daily life and especially in marriage, sacrifice is an essential trait for success. Check any examples that apply to you.

For me, taking up a cross means:

____ a. being insulted for doing the right thing.
____ b. being honest in all situations.
____ c. sharing my possessions with others.
____ d. doing what I think Jesus would want me to do in a given situation.
____ e. holding my tongue and not belittling others.
____ f. doing necessary but boring things.
____ g. other: _______________________________________________________

Learning about Mary

Test your general knowledge about Mary and Marian devotions. Use various reference materials to help you fill-in the blanks.

Countries: Many appeared in the following locations. In what countries are these famous places?

3. Lourdes: _____________

4. Mary is the patron saint of the United States. Under which title is she the patron saint? ________________

Feasts: Match the dates with the feasts.

____ 5. Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God a. March 25
____ 6. Immaculate Conception b. August 15
____ 7. Our Lady of the Rosary c. January 1
____ 8. Annunciation d. October 7
____ 9. Assumption e. December 8

Potpourri:
10. In what year did Pope Pius XII define the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary into heaven? ____________________________

11. Describe what Mary is doing in the famous statue, The Pietà:

______________________________________________________________________________

12. List two of the so-called “seven sorrows of Mary”:
   a. ________________________________________________________________
   b. ________________________________________________________________

13. How many stars are shown forming a crown around Mary’s head? (Hint: Rv12:1):

______________________________________________________________________________

14. Name Mary’s mother and father: ________________________________
15. Write the famous Marian prayer, the “Memorare.”

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Score one point for each correct answer from 1–14; score five points for a correct answer to 15.