

Apologetics of Love - In Brief

For Notre Dame OCIA

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July 19th, 2025

Abstract

These “In-Brief” pages are short, readable reflections on some of the Church’s core teachings. They’re based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), but written in a way that speaks to real life, especially for students and young adults trying to make sense of faith today.

You don’t need to have it all figured out. You don’t even need to be sure where to start. These handouts are meant to walk with you through the OCIA journey. They teach doctrine and by doing so open up what it means to be loved by God, to belong to a community, and to live a life of purpose and grace.

Feel free to start at the beginning, or pick any topic that interests you. You’ll find real questions, meaningful answers that lead you to even more questions, and an invitation to something deeper.

Welcome to the journey.

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1 CCC #26-49: Natural Knowledge of God

1.1 Why are you here today?

Why are you here today? Do you have that yearning desire to know more about what God is, not know much about faith, think you know it, already attend Mass, or are here because your family, friends, or roommate told you to come? Whatever it is, you are here today, and you have some sort of desire to be here.

1.2 What is your desire, and what are you hungry for?

What is your desire, and what are you hungry for? In college, you can get hungry to get that A in advanced Chemistry or Calculus 5. But if you do get a good grade in that difficult class, are you really satisfied, or are you searching for “something more”? “The desire for God is written [on your] human heart” (CCC 27). Every person, whether they know it or not, carries this desire within, and maybe that’s why you are here today.

However, “This ‘intimate and vital bond’ of man to God can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected” (CCC 29). Often in life, it is easy to get distracted and you end up filling the space with other goals, or even idols like grades, achievements, and approval. However, these “things” can never truly satisfy.

1.3 Do I need to have faith yet?

You may be asking, What exactly is faith, and do I even have it yet? What makes it different from just another task? With faith, we are not fitting a square peg into a round hole. Faith and a proper relationship with God fulfill this desire. Although your faith may not be developed yet, we hope to grow it throughout the year.

1.4 The Desire for God

Regardless of whether you have faith yet, everyone has a natural desire for God. This can generate “ways of coming to know God” (CCC31). We all come from a starting point, and you are here with us now. You may see beauty in the world and wonder how it is created or what makes it beautiful, there must be something more (CCC 32, 33). This gives rise to what is called “natural knowledge of God”, that is known we can have by our own nature, for our reason, independent of revelation or faith (CCC 36). However, it is not without error (CCC 37) since it doesn’t answer the question of who God is. The language of God, based on natural knowledge, on the one hand always falls short, but on the other hand points to God (CCC 39-43).

1.5 Transcendent

For example, one may say, “God is good.” This is true, yet it is limiting since it is an analogy and compares God to a human person. This is because God is transcendent. So what does transcendence mean? Well, God goes beyond the physical world and human experience and is not limited to it. Therefore, we cannot fully grasp this as humans. Yet, you can have faith in God, and have him fill that God shaped hole in your heart. Often, we may not realize that the whole is a God shaped whole, since we are limited as humans and fall into temptation and sin. Because of this, we can create our own gods and become idolatrous. For example, you may think that your report card is like a god and must come before all things. However, whatever is on that piece of paper will not satisfy you. This is why you are here today: you are searching to find God, the one true God that will fill that hole you’ve been looking for.

1.6 Conclusion

Natural knowledge of God is just the beginning. It doesn’t paint the full picture. So don’t worry if you feel like you don’t fully “get it.” You’re not supposed to yet. But this is where we begin. That desire in you is not an accident; it’s an invitation.

2 CCC #142-170, 185: Faith

2.1 What is Faith?

What exactly is faith? You may be wondering, is it a belief? Somewhat, yet not entirely. If you are familiar with the Apostles Creed, which we will learn about later, it starts with the words “I believe.” But faith is not just words we say; it is something we live out. Faith is the “adequate response” to an invitation to a relationship; it includes beliefs, but is greater. It is a “submission” of one’s intellect and will to God (CCC 143).

2.2 Why Should We Have Faith and Trust God?

Since faith is an “entrustment of oneself” to God (CCC 150), why should I have it if I don’t see proof? Faith is not blind (CCC 156) but rather a kind of seeing

(CCC 163). It extends our vision to things otherwise invisible.

So what kind of seeing is this? If I see something, won't I believe it, and does it not exist otherwise? Well, seeing is not believing. Yet Faith isn't blind (CCC 156). In fact, it's a kind of vision (CCC 163), a way of seeing what can't be touched or measured. Think of love. Can you prove that someone loves you with scientific data? Not really. You can't see love itself, only the signs of it. And even those signs can't be forced or bought if someone gives you \$20, that doesn't prove love. In fact, if love had a price tag, it wouldn't be love at all. Similarly, faith isn't a transaction; it's deeply real, even if not physically measurable.

2.3 Seeking Understanding

So why can't you prove faith if "faith seeks understanding" (CCC 158)? Just because you can't prove it, doesn't mean it's irrational. You can learn more, and hopefully, you will throughout your OCIA journey. Faith invites us to ask questions and grow in knowledge and understanding.

In your science, math, and engineering classes, you also seek understanding, yet you can prove your hypothesis right or wrong when you get proper results. So why not faith? It's because faith isn't reducible to reason; otherwise, it wouldn't be revelation. Revelation includes truths freely disclosed by God that we couldn't discover on our own (CCC 51–70). We don't understand this because revelation involves God disclosing truths that surpass human understanding. Science doesn't contradict faith (CCC 159). As St. John Paul II said in *Fides et Ratio*, "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (1998).

2.4 Conclusion

Faith is not a mere feeling or blind hope. It is a personal, living response we have with God. It involves trust, understanding, and commitment. Even though faith can often be lived in darkness (164), we shouldn't hide our faith. We should share it with others.

Don't hide from faith just because you don't have all the answers. Don't wait for perfect evidence. Faith is a journey, not a formula. It's a light that guides us, even when the path isn't clear. As you continue your OCIA journey, remember that faith is both a gift and a response; something to be nurtured, questioned, explored, and, above all, lived.

3 CCC #232-267: The Trinity

3.1 What is the Trinity?

The Trinity is God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But what does that mean? Do we believe in one God as Catholics, or do we believe in three because of the Trinity? It is "one God in three persons" (CCC 253). How is this possible? It is because the Trinity is a Mystery, something that goes beyond our human limitations; something God is not bound by. Don't try to solve a mystery as you would a puzzle. A mystery is divinely revealed, and unaided reason cannot discover or attain to it unless it is revealed (CCC 237). The Trinity is at the

very heart of Christianity. Every time we make the Sign of the Cross, we invoke this central mystery.

Therefore, the Trinity is consubstantial (CCC 253). Whoa, consubstantial, that's a big word, what does it mean? Consubstantial means "of the same substance". The Trinity is three persons in one substance. And "each of them is God whole and entire" (CCC 253).

3.2 Oh, it's just a Shamrock?

Oh, so it's then just like a Shamrock, a three-leaf clover, right? No, in a three-leaf clover, you have three parts of a leaf. Even though it is the same leaf, you can separate the three leaves into individual parts. You cannot separate God into parts; that would be an offense against reason that precedes heresy. Likewise, it is not like water since ice, water, and steam, that's three modes. Don't compare the Trinity to human things, as it often leads to heresy. The Mystery goes beyond our human understanding.

Well, if we can't create an analogy out of human objects, how can we prove it? Proving things with our limited understanding is difficult, yet let's take a look at scripture as our guide.

3.3 Why Did Jesus Pray?

If Jesus is fully God, why did He pray during the Agony in the Garden by saying "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39)? He prayed since He is fully human AND fully divine (CCC 464-469). The fact of Jesus' humanity and divinity does not take away from the Trinity. God did not pray to an idol, else He wouldn't be praying. At the same time, He did not pray to himself because that would be a monologue. He prayed to the Father. This prayer was God bending himself down to us out of love and showing humility. Therefore, He must be praying to the same thing but not the same one. Similarly, this can be seen when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, out of love for us (Matthew 3:16-17).

This shows that He is fully human, but what shows that He is fully God? Jesus calmed the waters without praying, which only God can do: "He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Quiet! Be still!' The wind ceased, and there was great calm. Then He asked them, 'Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?' They were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?'" (Mark 4:39-41). The disciples were amazed and knew that He was truly God. This is because the Old Testament states that only God can "rule the raging sea" and "its swelling waves" (Psalm 89:10).

Just as Jesus is one person with two natures, so too the Trinity is one God in three persons; it is a divine mystery.

3.4 His Love for Us

The Trinity shows God's love for us. His love is self-emptying for us. "The Father generates the Son out of love" and pours his love out to him (*Essential Writings* Lubich 205). Similarly, the Son pours out that love fully, and "returns [it] to the Father". Finally, the Holy Spirit "is the love that circulates between"

them and shows their “bond of unity” (*Essential Writings* Lubich 205). Without all three, you don’t have the Trinity, God, or His true love for us.

3.5 Conclusion

The Trinity is not a problem to be solved, but a relationship to enter. Through baptism, we are invited into the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (CCC 265). Though the mystery is beyond human grasp, it is not beyond our experience. Every act of love and communion echoes the communion of the Trinity. As you journey through OCIA, remember: you are not just learning about God, you are being drawn to Him by his love.

4 CCC #599-623: Death of the Lord and Atonement

4.1 Jesus’ Death and Resurrection

Jesus’ Death and Resurrection are at the heart of Christianity. Today, we are specifically going to cover the Death of the Lord and His atonement. In Jesus’ Death, He loved us “to the end”, and that gave us triumph over death. Think about that, God loved us so much that he would suffer and die for us. He did not come down from the cross since He was God. He loved us “to the end” (John 1:31) and by that very means we are saved. This love is not impersonal or forced. It is of His total self-gift (CCC 609).

4.2 Jesus Joins Us As Sinners (even though He is not a sinner)

In the Incarnation, “one of the Trinity” became flesh. He had real, fragile, death-bound flesh. He didn’t just come down as a spirit. Jesus took on a human nature not immune to pain or sorrow, but fully subject to the conditions of the fallen world in all ways except sin (CCC 602). “The word was made flesh” (John 1:14). Although He did not sin, He entered into the condition of sinners.

"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (Corinthians 5:21).

This condition started when He became flesh, and you can go back to His Birth. However, this was revealed in Baptism (Luke 3:21). He didn’t need to be baptized since he was God, but He did so since He had joined us. Jesus shows us what divine solidarity looks like. He stands among sinners, not to accuse them, but to save them. He does not remain aloof. He steps into the river with us.

4.3 His Solidarity with Us

Because of the Fall, human solidarity had been broken, fractured by sin, pride, and death. Jesus’ baptism was the first public sign that He had entered into our condition, not to be cleansed Himself, but to stand with us in our need. Yet His identification with sinners did not end at the Jordan; it would deepen all the way to the Cross. Christ enters that fallen solidarity not to affirm it, but

to transform it. By dying in our place, He creates a new bond: not solidarity in sin, but solidarity in His love (CCC 613, 616).

Christ became the new Adam. The first Adam joined us in sin and death; the second Adam joins us in death to free us from sin. This is the mystery of atonement: we were bound to death, and Christ has bound Himself to us. He loves us so much that He took our penalty for us. Because of this, “we” are bound in this love and are bound in his solidarity.

By placing Himself in solidarity with sinners to the point of accepting the penalty of sin, though sinless, Jesus redeems us from the fallen solidarity. The solidarity in sin and death, and recreates our human solidarity as solidarity in His love (CCC 613, 616). The Mystery of the Resurrection (this is an entire topic) The Cross was not the end. It was the turning point. In His Resurrection, Jesus reveals the true meaning of His death. It was not failure, but victory. Not abandonment, but union.

When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into this very mystery (CCC 628). We enter into His death so that we might also rise with Him. Our suffering, our struggle, even our death, now become places where we can encounter Him.

4.4 Conclusion

The death of Christ is not simply an event in history. It is a living invitation. On the Cross, Jesus gave us more than forgiveness. He gave us fellowship, a way to live no longer alone, but in union with Him and with one another.

As you continue your OCIA journey, remember you are not just learning about Jesus. You are being invited to live with Him, and even more, in Him.

Jesus loved us to the end. Now He invites you into that love.

5 CCC #683-747: The Holy Spirit

5.1 Introduction

Last time, we discussed how God is self-emptying and how Christ loved us “to the end” (cf. John 13:1). Now, we turn to the one who makes that love alive in us: the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not a force or an idea. He is God, fully divine, the third Person of the Trinity. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

5.2 Self-Giving Love

God’s love is not abstract. It is concrete, relational, and self-emptying. From all eternity, the Father loves the Son, and the Son returns that love, and the Holy Spirit is the fruit or “flowering-forth” of that love (CCC 735, Aquinas ST I Q37 a2). The Spirit is not just some “add-on” to God’s life. It’s not like an extra credit assignment or optional readings. He is essential and is the love of the Trinity. This means the Holy Spirit is not merely a presence around us, but God’s love in person, given to us. He is both the gift of God’s love and, as God, the giver of grace (CCC 733-734).

His love is not locked away in heaven. It is intimate, but not private. The Spirit who binds the Father and Son also binds us to God and one another (CCC 736). This perfect love, poured out on the Cross, now lives in us through the Spirit.

Human love often needs privacy to grow since we are limited and can't do everything. Yet the Holy Spirit is not limited in this way. The Spirit makes love givable and is always self-giving. Imagine if you were never tired, and could always be spreading Christ's love, 24/7/365, even during the stressful seasons of life, like final exams. That is the love that the Holy Spirit gives us; He is always giving.

5.3 The Holy Spirit Points to Christ

One of the beautiful marks of the Holy Spirit is humility. The Spirit does not call attention to Himself, but always points to Christ (CCC 687, 689). He prepares our hearts to encounter Jesus, not just once, but again and again. It is through the Spirit that we come to know Jesus as "Lord", the one who loved us to the end (CCC 683). Only in the Holy Spirit can we truly believe. He opens our hearts to faith, teaches us to pray, and helps us recognize Jesus, not just as a historical figure, but as someone alive in us (CCC 684, 736).

This is not just theology. It's a relationship. He brings Christ close to us, not as a memory, but as someone truly alive in us.

5.4 Conclusion

If Jesus' death was His self-gift of love, then the Holy Spirit is that love given to us. The Spirit doesn't just visit. He stays with us and is always present.

As you continue your OCIA journey, remember: the Holy Spirit is not a bonus. He is the very presence of God's love, dwelling in you, pointing you to Christ, and forming you into someone who loves like Him.

He is the breath of new life. He is the bond of divine love. And He is always with you.

6 CCC #1322-1419: The Eucharist

6.1 Introduction

The Eucharist is not just a symbol or a reminder; it is Jesus Christ, truly and substantially present under the appearances of bread and wine. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she enters into the one sacrifice of Christ on the Cross (CCC 1366), not by repeating it, but by making it present. The Eucharist is a living memorial of His passion, death, and resurrection (CCC 1362–1365).

Jesus said, "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:51). In every Mass, this promise is fulfilled.

6.2 Christ's Sacrifice Made Present

The Eucharist is a sacrificial memorial. That means it doesn't just help us remember Christ's sacrifice; it makes it present (CCC 1363–1367). This is why

we call the Eucharist a sacrifice: it is Christ's once-for-all offering on the Cross, now made sacramentally present at the altar.

The Eucharist isn't a reenactment. It's Christ Himself, offering Himself to the Father for our salvation. It is His same love poured out (CCC 766), the love that brought the Church into being, and that still sustains her. That's why we say, "The Eucharist makes the Church" (CCC 1396).

6.3 Worship and Mission

Because the Eucharist is Christ, we don't worship the bread or wine; we worship the Lord present under those forms. And this worship leads to gratitude, transformation, and mission. When you go to Adoration, you aren't going there to see a piece of bread; you are going there to connect with Christ. And when you receive the Eucharist at your First Communion, you will receive the full Christ, not part of Him.

The Eucharist orients us toward the poor (CCC 1397) because we are united with Christ, who became poor for our sake. It also orients us toward the future: toward the return of Christ in glory and the final fulfillment of His Kingdom (CCC 1402–1405). Christ bent down to us and poured out His love for us. The word Eucharist means thanksgiving. And we should be thankful for this every time we receive the Eucharist.

6.4 The Eucharist: Source and Summit

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life (CCC 1324). That means everything flows from it, and everything returns to it. It is the center of the Church's life. Without the Eucharist, there is no Church.

A Protestant community may be Christian, but without the Eucharist, it lacks the fullness of the Church. The Eucharist makes the Church because it makes Christ present. And it is important to remember, it is not we who act, it is Christ who acts in the sacrament.

Now, Christ is not present in the Eucharist in a physical, biological way. You won't see blood cells under a microscope. Rather, He is present in a "substantial" way that is, truly and wholly, though under the appearances of bread and wine. This change is called Transubstantiation: the "substance" of bread and wine becomes the Body and Blood of Christ, while the "accidents" are the outward properties like appearance, taste, and texture remain unchanged.

So no, this is not cannibalism. But neither is it merely symbolic. It is Christ Himself, substantially present, who gives Himself to us under these sacramental signs.

6.4.1 Analogy (Note Analogies are limiting)

Think of Notre Dame Stadium on gameday. When it's empty, it's just concrete and steel. But when it's filled with fans and the team runs out, it becomes Notre Dame. Not just a place, but a living expression of spirit, identity, and presence. Something changes, not in the materials, but in what's really happening there.

This can help us begin to understand what happens in the Eucharist. The appearance of bread and wine remains, just like the stadium still looks like concrete and steel, but the substance becomes something totally new. By the

words of Christ and the power of the Spirit, it becomes His Body and Blood. We call this Transubstantiation; a real change in what it is, even though the accidents stay the same.

Of course, every analogy has limits. Notre Dame Stadium is still a stadium; it doesn't actually become the University. But in the Eucharist, the change is even more profound. It's not just symbolic or communal energy; it is Christ Himself, truly and substantially present. Not metaphor, but mystery made real.

6.5 Conclusion

The Eucharist is not just a ritual or a symbol. It is Christ Himself: crucified, risen, and present among us. He gives Himself to you, not as a piece or a memory, but as the whole Christ.

As you prepare for First Communion, know that you are preparing to receive the deepest mystery of our faith, the very gift that keeps the Church alive. You are being invited not just to believe in Christ, but to be united with Him. And this union will send you out into the world to love and serve others with the same self-giving love that you receive on the altar.

7 CCC #1420-1498: Penance

7.1 Introduction

Jesus didn't leave us alone in our sin. He gave us a way back.

The Sacrament of Penance, also called Confession or Reconciliation, isn't about guilt trips or jumping through hoops. It's about healing a relationship. Through this sacrament, Christ restores us to grace when we've damaged or even broken that relationship through sin.

If you're preparing for Baptism, you won't need to go to Confession beforehand, because Baptism wipes away all sin (CCC 1263–1264). But after you're baptized, the struggle against sin continues, and the sacrament of Penance becomes a necessary part of Christian life.

7.2 Why Confess to a Priest?

Can't you just tell God you're sorry?

Yes, you can always speak directly to God. In fact, the Church teaches that if someone has perfect contrition, truly sorrowful for sin out of love for God, sins can be forgiven even before going to Confession though the obligation is still there (CCC 1452). But for most of us, contrition is usually imperfect; we're sorry out of fear of consequences or regret, but not fully transformed by love (CCC 1453). That's why Jesus gave us the Sacrament: so we could receive real assurance of mercy through the priest, who acts in the person of Christ (CCC 1441–1445).

7.3 What Happens in Confession?

The structure of the sacrament (CCC 1448) involves:

7.3.1 God's Action

God forgives sin through the ministry of the Church. The priest may not be perfect, but he acts with the authority Christ gave him. It's not the priest who forgives you, it's God, working through him.

7.3.2 Our Action: the Acts of the Penitent (CCC 1450)

- Contrition (CCC 1451–1454): This means sorrow for your sin. It can be perfect (because you love God) or imperfect (because you fear punishment). Even imperfect contrition is enough to receive forgiveness; God meets us where we are.
- Confession (CCC 1455–1458): We speak our sins out loud to a priest. This isn't for God's benefit, He already knows, but for ours. Speaking our sins breaks their power. It also allows us to experience being forgiven by Christ through the Church.
- Satisfaction (penance) (CCC 1459–1460): Repairing the consequences of sin.

At the end, when the priest absolves you of your sins, it is God working through the priest, and you know that you are absolved. This way, it isn't self-forgiveness where you "assume" that you are forgiven.

Example: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been [X time since my last confession / my first confession]. I'm sorry for being prideful, I've gossiped about friends, I've missed Sunday Mass twice without a serious reason. . ."

The priest may give advice, then say: "For your penance, say three Hail Marys and do one intentional act of kindness for a roommate." He'll ask if you can do it. Then you'll make an Act of Contrition and receive absolution, God's mercy made audible.

7.4 What If You're Nervous?

Confession can feel awkward, especially the first time. But know that the priest is not there to judge you. He cannot tell anyone what you've said, ever (CCC 1467). You don't need to remember a script. Just be honest. But if you want to bring a list, feel free to do so. If you forget something unintentionally, it's still forgiven. But if you know that you've made a particular sin, you must confess it. If you're not sure whether something is a sin, ask the priest. He's there to help.

7.5 Mortal vs. Venial Sin

After Baptism, we can still commit sin, but not all sin is equal (CCC 1854–1864)

Venial sins are real offenses, but they wound our relationship with God without breaking it.

Mortal sins, by contrast, are grave matters (serious sins), done with full knowledge and deliberate consent. They destroy charity in the soul and cut us off from God's life.

7.6 How Can You Tell if a Sin Is Mortal or Venial?

Let's take an example close to home. Say you skip Sunday Mass.

If you knowingly and freely choose to skip Mass without a serious reason, because you just didn't feel like going, that's a mortal sin.

But if you overslept by accident or had a genuine emergency, that's likely not mortal, maybe not a sin at all, or at most venial.

What if you started skipping Mass regularly out of laziness or spiritual discouragement? It may have been mortal the first time, but over time, if your freedom is diminished, due to habit, despair, etc., it might be venial. However, it could be mortal since habitual serious sin is still a grave matter. Personal culpability plays a factor in whether it is mortal or not.

That's why it's helpful to talk this through in Confession. The priest can help you sort through the seriousness of a sin without shame or fear.

7.7 Sin and the Eucharist

Mortal sin requires confession before receiving the Eucharist again (CCC 1385). But venial sins don't require confession before Communion, though it's still helpful and healing. And remember from last time that the Eucharist forgives us of venial sins. When receiving the Eucharist, we are accepting Christ, so we must be in a state of grace. That is why it is important to go to confession after committing a mortal sin. If you have only committed venial sins, it still may be beneficial to receive confession on a regular basis. Some people go to confession monthly. People often go to confession during Advent and Lent as well. But don't obsess over every small slip. You don't need to confess every venial sin daily. Confession is not about fear; it's about forming a healthy rhythm of grace.

7.8 Conclusion

Confession Is an Encounter with Christ

The Sacrament of Penance is one of the most beautiful gifts Jesus gave us. It's not about shame, it's about grace. It's Christ meeting you where you are, embracing you, and forgiving you by saying, "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."

If you're preparing for Baptism, rejoice, you'll be washed clean once and for all.

If you're already baptized, Confession is the way to come home whenever you need to.

Never be afraid to go back to Christ. He already knows you. And He's ready to forgive, every time.

8 Conclusion

Through this journey, you have just begun learning about the Doctrines, the Church, and what it means to be a part of the Communion of Saints. You are now entering into the life that they reveal. From the natural desire for God written in our hearts to the living presence of the Holy Spirit, we've explored points to one reality: God's love calls us into communion with Himself and with one another. This journey through the OCIA is more than study; it is formation, transformation, and invitation. You are not simply learning about

God; you are being drawn into His life, to live in His love, and to share that love with the world.

9 Appendix

**Not Graded

9.1 CCC #385-421: Original Sin

9.1.1 What is Original Sin?

In Genesis, we see that Adam and Eve’s “personal sin” “affected human nature.” This sin is “transmitted by propagation to all of mankind,” and deprives us of “original holiness and justice” (CCC 404). This is known as original sin. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed an interior harmony: their desires aligned with reason and with God’s will. But after the Fall, this balance was shattered. As St. Augustine discusses, they lost the original ease with which they could do the good, and introduced into the human condition a kind of interior disorder, which the Church calls concupiscence—the inclination toward sin (CCC 405).

You may be asking, if we are all created in the Image of God (Gen 1:21), why can we sin? When we were made in God’s image, we were made rational and free. With this dignity we can “freely give [ourselves] and enter into communion with other[s]” (CCC 357). This gives us the capacity to know and choose the good. But it also carries the risk of rejecting God and sinning. We can often find this choice difficult, and, in fact, it is a battle (409).

This battle is difficult! Because we are free, we can become selfish and ignore others in their greatest time of need. Turning away from others and God can lead to sin. Avoiding this can be extremely challenging since our human solidarity has fallen due to original sin. In society, it can be easy to get caught up in. For instance, in the gravy train, one cares about money at the expense of God and others. Therefore, it is important to remember to put Christ first, and if we do this, we shall avoid sin.

9.1.2 In every human choice, is one of the available alternatives necessarily sinful?

In every human choice, is one of the available alternatives necessarily sinful? No, it isn’t! Sometimes it can feel like that if you are presented with two good options. Like, should I help my friend study for their Physics II test, or should I help another friend with their Writing and Rhetoric essay? These situations can be difficult because it may seem that you will disappoint someone, no matter what. This isn’t a sin, it’s a choice between two good options. Additionally, getting a poor grade on a test isn’t a sin in itself. You shouldn’t say, I am bad at this subject, and am stupid and a sinner because of it. We all have our strengths given from God and shall use them wisely. Just because someone is better at a topic doesn’t make you a bad person. It is important to remember that “sin is an abuse of the freedom that God gives to created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving one another” (CCC 387). Therefore, there is a difference between a choice and a sin.

9.1.3 Original Sin is not Personal Sin

Original sin is “contracted and not committed” (CCC 404). It is a state and not an act. It has been “transmitted by propagation to all humankind” (CCC 404). Original sin is the “reverse side of the Good News that Jesus is the savior of all [people], that all need salvation, and that salvation is offered to all through Christ (CCC 389). We see this sin clearly from the perspective of the Cross and the Revelation of Christ’s divine love that he pours out for us (CCC 388). Christ suffered and died for us so that we could have eternal life. The “ultimate meaning” of the fall could only be revealed “in the light of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ” (CCC 388).

9.1.4 Conclusion

It is important to remember that God is good, creation is good, yet evil can enter the world through sin. God permits the entry of evil into his creation, since God gives us free will and orders all things for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28). Ancient heresies like Gnosticism taught that the material world was evil. But the Church, following thinkers like St. Irenaeus, proclaims that creation is redeemable through Christ (CCC 421). God doesn’t abandon what He creates; He redeems it.

Through Baptism, the stain of Original Sin is washed away, and we are restored to grace (CCC 405). But the effects remain (CCC 1263). Christian life is a journey, not a one-time event.

And that’s exactly what the OCIA journey is about: not just learning about doctrines and jumping through hoops, but being gradually conformed to Christ through grace. As you walk this path, remember that you’re not just studying what the Church believes, but being invited into who God is and what He desires for you. A life of communion, healing, and holiness. So even as we face the reality of sin, we do so with hope. Because Christ has already won the victory.

9.2 CCC #946-962: The Communion of Saints

9.2.1 Introduction

The communion of saints is the Church (CCC 946). It is everyone in the Church. It is not just the particular Saints with a capital ‘S’. It’s all the baptized. It’s the whole family of God, on earth, in Heaven, and even in purgatory, united in Christ (CCC 954).

9.2.2 Christ as Head of the Church and the Gift of Communion

The communion of saints is first and foremost communion in Christ. “What is shared is holy,” and is a “communion among holy things . . . and holy persons” (CCC 948). And the most important is Jesus Christ.

Christ is the Head of this body (CCC 947). And His headship is not managerial, it’s self-giving love. Christ doesn’t guide the Church like a CEO. He gives Himself, completely and forever. And that self-gift is efficacious.

Whoa, efficacious, what is that? Efficacious accomplishes what it signifies. When Christ gives Himself, He brings us into union with Him and with one another. His grace doesn't just invite us, it transforms us.

The communion of saints is not a metaphor; it's real. And because it's rooted in the Risen Christ, not even death can break it (CCC 954). That's why the Church speaks of three states of the Church:

- The Church Militant – the faithful on earth, still on the journey.
- The Church Suffering – the souls in purgatory, being purified.
- The Church Triumphant – the saints in Heaven, fully united to Christ.

All are united in one Church in Christ.

9.2.3 Particular Saints and Their Intercession

Among the members of this communion are the Particular Saints, the Saints in Heaven. Their union with Christ is complete, and they now intercede for us (CCC 956). Their intercession doesn't compete with Christ's role as the one mediator (1 Tim 2:5); rather, they participate in His perfect mediation.

To pray to the Saints is to pray to others who are fully alive in Him. Their prayers are always directed toward the same goal: deeper union with Jesus. Therefore, we can pray to the saints in addition to praying to Christ. The particular Saints did have particular roles on earth, though. And because of this, Saints are often the patron Saint of something. For example, Cosmas and Damian are the patron saints of doctors.

For your Confirmation, you can choose any saint who is known to be in Heaven. That includes Saints, Blesseds, Venerables, and Servants of God. Before choosing your Confirmation Saint, pray about it and choose someone whom you can relate to or one who is a role model for you. When you choose your Confirmation saint, know that they are someone who's already run the race and encourages us as we run ours (cf. Heb 12:1).

9.2.4 A Communion Shared in Prayer and Love

This communion is more than an invisible connection. It's expressed through prayer and love. We pray for the dead (CCC 958) because love doesn't stop there. It continues to those in purgatory, and ultimately, those in Heaven. Baptism brings us into this communion. And you are about to join this communion in a few [weeks/months], when you receive the sacrament of Baptism. The sacraments (CCC 947), especially the Eucharist (CCC 950), nourish us. Christ gives Himself to each of us, so that we might give ourselves to one another (CCC 953).

The communion of saints reveals the Church as more than an institution; it's a living organism, the Body of Christ, animated by His Spirit and bound together through Christ's self-giving love. Everyone in the Church also has unique charisms for building it up (CCC 951).

9.2.5 Conclusion

The communion of saints is not a sentimental idea. It is the lived reality of Christ's Church, rooted in His self-giving love and victorious over death.

We are excited for you to join the communion of saints when you receive your baptism. You will be joined to Christ the Head, nourished by His sacraments, and surrounded by the entire Church community. The saints are not distant; they are close, praying for you, encouraging you, and drawing near as Christ draws near.

9.3 CCC #1601-1666: Marriage

9.3.1 Introduction

Marriage is not something humans invented. It is a natural institution, written into the very fabric of creation (CCC 1601). In fact, "God himself is the author of marriage" (CCC 1603). From the beginning, man and woman were created for one another. They are complementary, equal in dignity, and united in a bond of love and life (CCC 1604–1605).

Marriage isn't just about a personal relationship. It's about a divine design, ordered toward communion and procreation (CCC 1652). It demands faithfulness, indissolubility, and an openness to life (CCC 1643-1644).

9.3.2 Marriage is a Sacrament

Marriage is more than a natural good; it is a sacrament. A visible and efficacious sign of His grace (CCC 1613, 1660). The beginning of Christ's public ministry was at the wedding at Cana. This was no coincidence. It was a sign that He was blessing, elevating, and entering into marriage Himself (CCC 1613).

Through Christ, marriage now signifies and participates in something deeper: the union of Christ and His Church (CCC 1612, 1616, 1661). Just as Christ's love for the Church is total, faithful, fruitful, and forever, so marriage becomes an icon of that divine spousal love.

Marriage isn't just about the romantic moments. Its grace is a real, enduring bond, even when you don't feel it. In fact, it's often in trial that the grace of the sacrament is most clearly revealed (CCC 1641-1642). The intimacy of Christian marriage is not rooted in sexual attraction alone, but in a bond that is efficaciously present, binding spouses into one flesh, one life.

9.3.3 The Shape of Christian Love: Spousal and Virgin

This spousal shape of love is not only lived out in marriage. The entire Christian life is marked by the love between Christ and the Church (CCC 1617). This is also expressed in consecrated virginity or celibacy for the Kingdom (CCC 1618–1620). Virgins and celibates don't reject marriage; they point beyond it just as matrimony, as a sacrament, points beyond itself to the marriage of Christ the Bridegroom. Marriage and virginity work together; you can not have one in the Church without the other. They both rise and fall together.

The two are not in competition. They interpret one another. Each depends on the other to fully show the mystery: that we were made for communion for a love that gives all and receives all.

9.3.4 Before the Fall - And Beyond

Marriage was not a fix for sin; it was part of the plan from the start (CCC 1609). It's a divine institution, present before the Fall, reflecting humanity's original vocation: to love, to create, to be in communion (CCC 1604).

We struggle to imagine what a perfect marriage or virginity looks like because we live after the Fall. But the Eucharist is our window into paradise and is the perfect communion for which we were made. And whether through marriage or celibacy, we are invited into that communion, even now.

9.3.5 Conclusion

Marriage is not just a cultural contract. It is a covenant, a sacrament, and a sign of God's enduring love. It begins in creation, is elevated in Christ, and points us toward the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb.

Whether or not you're called to marriage, understanding it is essential to understanding the Christian life. The Church is the Bride of Christ, and you are being drawn into that intimate, unbreakable communion through the sacraments, most especially Baptism and the Eucharist.

And that's the amazing part: even before you marry (or if you never do), your life is already caught up in Christ's spousal love, a love that never fails.

9.4 CCC #1533-1600: Holy Orders

9.4.1 Introduction

Every baptized person shares in the priesthood of Christ. But not all share in it the same way. In the Church, there is one priesthood, the priesthood of Christ, and all participate in His priesthood (CCC 1545). There are two distinct participations in this one priesthood: the common priesthood of all the faithful, given through Baptism, and the ministerial priesthood, given through the Sacrament of Holy Orders (CCC 1546–1547).

The ordained priesthood is not about power or status. You don't become "more Catholic" through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It's about service to the baptized faithful and to all (CCC 1547).

9.4.2 The Three Degrees of Holy Orders

Holy Orders include three distinct degrees: bishop, priest (presbyter), and deacon (diaconate) (CCC 1554). Each is a sacramental participation in Christ's mission, but in different ways.

- Bishops receive the fullness of the sacrament and are successors to the Apostles (CCC 1555–1556).
- Priests are co-workers with the bishop and act in the name of Christ, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist (CCC 1562–1566).
- Deacons are ordained not to the priesthood but to service, particularly in charity, word, and liturgy (CCC 1569–1571).

Priests and bishops in the Latin (Western) Church cannot marry because they are called to celibacy; a total gift of self to Christ and His Church (CCC 1579). Their celibacy reflects the undivided love of Christ the Bridegroom for His Bride, the Church. Deacons may be married, but only before ordination. If a married deacon’s wife dies, he cannot remarry (CCC 1579). This discipline shows that ordained ministry involves a radical dedication to Christ.

9.4.3 Acting in the Person of Christ the Head

The ordained priest doesn’t simply lead or facilitate. He is configured to Christ in a unique way to act in the person of Christ the Head (in persona Christi capitis) (CCC 1548). That means when a priest offers the Eucharist, it is Christ Himself who acts. The priest is not doing his own thing or forming a spiritual club, he is re-presenting the work of Christ, in service of the Church.

Because of this deep union with Christ the Head, the priest can stand before God on behalf of the Church and before the Church in the name of God (CCC 1552–1553). That’s why the liturgy doesn’t belong to the priest alone; it belongs to the whole Church. He offers it not as an individual, but as a representative of Christ and the Church together.

9.4.4 A Sacrament Conferred and Received

Only a bishop can validly confer the sacrament of Holy Orders (CCC 1576), and it can only be received by a baptized man (CCC 1577). This is not arbitrary; it is rooted in Christ’s own will and example. Jesus chose twelve men as Apostles, not because of cultural norms, but as a deliberate expression of His will. For this reason, the Church teaches definitively that the ordination of women is not possible (CCC 1577, John Paul II - *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*).

It’s important to note that religious life, like monks or nuns, and Holy Orders are not the same thing. Someone can be ordained and not in religious life, like a diocesan priest, or be a religious without being ordained, like a religious brother or sister. Some people are called to both, and others are called to the laity. One is not greater than the other.

Holy Orders and Religious	Religious (Only)
Holy Cross Priest	Holy Cross Brother / Sister
Holy Orders (Only)	Lay (Neither)
Diocesan Priest	A single or married layperson

Table 1: Holy Orders and Religious: This is an example; there are many that fit into each role.

9.4.5 Ordered to the Baptized

The ministerial priesthood is not a “higher” version of the Christian life. It is different in kind, not degree, from the common priesthood of all believers (CCC 1547). Priests do not receive “more” grace than the baptized. Rather, Holy Orders confers the graces necessary to live out the ordained life in service

to the Church. Therefore, they are ordained to build up and serve the baptized by preaching the Word, celebrating the sacraments, and shepherding the community.

In this way, the ordained ministry exists not for its own sake but for yours, to nourish and strengthen the Church, the Body of Christ (CCC 1547, 1551).

9.4.6 Conclusion

Holy Orders is the sacrament by which Christ continues to shepherd and sanctify His Church through ordained ministers. The priesthood is not man-made. It is Christ's priesthood, extended through space and time to His Body, the Church.

Whether bishop, priest, or deacon, those ordained are called to conform their lives to Christ the Servant, Christ the High Priest, and Christ the Bridegroom. Their ministry is not their own; it is Christ working through them, for you.

As you prepare to receive the sacraments of initiation, know that every homily, every Eucharist, every confession, every anointing is Christ Himself drawing near, acting through the one He has called and ordained.

9.5 Dedication

I am deeply grateful to the Notre Dame OCIA, Short Course, and RCIA teams for walking with me through this faith journey. Your guidance, witness, and generosity have shaped not only what I've learned but how I hope to live. To all those who are now beginning OCIA or Short Course, know that you are already in my prayers. You are not alone. You are part of something beautiful.

A special thanks to the incredible team members who made this possible: Brett Perkins, Fr. Brian Chiang, C.S.C., Meredith Meyer, Christian Quillon, and Eric Washkewicz, C.S.C.. Your presence and support have been a gift.

I am especially thankful for my godchild, Shri (Thomas Aquinas) Thakur, and for the grace of accompanying my sponsees, Parker (Michael the Archangel) Solomone and Demetrius (Cosmas Damian) Hernandez. You've inspired me more than you know.

Heartfelt thanks as well to the sponsor-candidate pairs who have guided and encouraged me along the way: Matthew Lad & Ryan (Carlo Augustine) Hartung, Sarah Mirkin & Ingrid (Casilda of Toledo) Corpus, Genelle Porras & Emily (Gianna) Arenas, Madeline Page & Natalie (Joan of Arc) Morris, and Amy Bechtel & Charlie (Margaret of Scotland) Mason. Your faith and friendship have been a profound blessing.

Finally, I thank my family, my friends, the Congregation of Holy Cross, and above all, God who makes all things new.

Ave Crux Spes Unica!