

## What are the Precepts of the Catholic Church?

The precepts of the Church are intended to assist Catholic Christians in living a moral life nourished by the sacramental worship of the Church. The precepts represent the *minimum* that Catholics should do if they wish to truly walk closer with Christ and discern His call in their lives. These precepts help to define someone who is considered a “Catholic in Good Standing”. These individuals may therefore be eligible to be godparents, Confirmation sponsors or get married in a Catholic Church providing that they are also living a moral life as defined by the Church.

So what precisely are the minimum requirements of participation in the sacramental life? The Church provides us with five precepts (which can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 2041-2043):

1. ***“You shall attend Catholic Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.”*** Every baptized Catholic is called to participate in the Eucharist celebration with the Catholic community on Sunday, as a remembrance of Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday. They are also required to attend Mass on designated holy days. These holy days of obligation are the feasts of Mary as Mother of God (Jan. 1), the Ascension of our Lord (40 days after Easter), the Assumption of Mary, body and soul into heaven (Aug. 15), All Saints (Nov. 1), the Immaculate Conception of Mary (Dec. 8), and Christmas Day (Dec.25). They are also called to ‘rest from those works and activities’ that will detract from the holiness of these days. We are called to ask ourselves if our activity can be done for the glory of God and if it is truly necessary that it be done on these holy days. It is in this way that we keep the Third Commandment: to Keep Holy the Sabbath Day.
2. ***“You shall confess your sins at least once a year.”*** Every baptized Catholic (having attended the age of reason) is required to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, “which continues Baptism’s work of conversion and forgiveness” at least once a year. This is to ensure *the state of grace* for the proper reception of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. It is considered an act of sacrilege to receive Holy Communion if you have committed a mortal sin (this is an act that is fully deliberate and of serious nature by thought word or deed, in violation of God’s Law). Reconciliation removes that sin from our soul and allows us to receive Jesus worthily. Please note that the reception of Communion is separate from the attendance of Mass requirement. You are to attend Mass (as stated in the first precept) regardless of your ability to receive Communion. Reconciliation schedules are listed in the bulletins and on the website [www.honesdalecatholic.com](http://www.honesdalecatholic.com).

3. ***“You shall receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.”*** This precept was issued at a time in the Church’s history when many people abstained from receiving Holy Communion because of feelings of unworthiness. The Church recognized that such reverence and piety can be a good thing, however Christ tells us that, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (John 6:56). For this reason, every Catholic who is in a state of grace should receive Holy Communion as often as possible and at a minimum at least once during the Easter season.
  
4. ***“You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church”.*** This precept helps us to remember the importance of penitential practices (no pain; no gain), which helps us to prepare for the celebration of the Eucharist. This includes specific days in the liturgical year (such as Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and all Fridays in Lent), as well as the mandatory fast before going to Mass (one hour before receiving Holy Communion). ***Fasting:*** Catholics in the United States, from the day after their 18th birthday until the day after their 59th birthday are obliged to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Church law allows for only one moderate meal a day, and prohibits the combined quantity of the two smaller meals to exceed the quantity eaten at the full meal. The drinking of ordinary liquids does not break the fast. Note: people taking medication, or with health concerns should follow their doctor’s advice on fasting. ***Abstinence from meat:*** Catholics in the United States ages 14 and older (with no maximum age) are obliged to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the Fridays of Lent. Church law prohibits the use of meat, but does not prohibit eggs, milk products or condiments made with animal fat. *Although the Second Vatican council removed the abstinence from meat requirement for every Friday (except during Lent), we are still obliged to make a “sacrifice” of some kind on Fridays as a remembrance of Jesus’ passion and death for us. Each Friday choose something that you will ‘give up’ or ‘do’ in honor of Jesus’ incredible sacrifice for us.*
  
5. ***“You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.”*** This means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to their own ability. Since we are unable to do anything that is good without God’s help, our earthly treasures are a blessing from Him. Jesus extolled the widow who gave from her ‘want’ rather than her surplus and also told how we should be storing up treasures in heaven for our **eternal** life.