

**Why We Believe:
Answering Common Questions
about the Catholic Faith**

Dr. Brant Pitre

- 1. Does God Exist?**
- 2. Is Jesus God?**
- 3. Peter and the Papacy**
- 4. How We Got the Bible**
- 5. The Eucharist: Jesus' Real Presence?**
- 6. Why Confess to a Priest?**
- 7. Do Catholics Worship Mary?**
- 8. Purgatory and Prayers for the Dead**

1. Does God Exist?

Introduction

1. “There is no God” (Atheism)
2. “Maybe there’s a God, but we can’t *know*” (Agnosticism)
3. “This world is all there is/no life after death” (Secularism/Materialism)
4. “There’s no such thing as ‘truth’” (Relativism)
5. Catholicism: God *exists*; there is such a thing as *truth*, and we can know him and it
6. If asked, “Why do you believe in God?” What would you say?
7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “arguments” for “the existence of God” (CCC 31)

Reasons to Believe in God

1. The World: the Universe itself (CCC 32)
 - a. Movement: What set the Universe in motion? (Powerful, Unmoved)
 - b. Becoming: What caused the Universe to begin to exist? (Transcendent)
 - c. Contingency: Every created thing depends on something else (Independent)
 - d. Order: Who designed the complexity of the Universe? (Intelligent)
 - e. Beauty: Who made the Universe beautiful? (Good)
 - f. St. Paul: “The world” → to God’s “invisible nature” (Rom 1:19-20)
 - g. St. Augustine: “the beauty of the earth” (*Sermon 241.2*)
 - g. “Book” of Creation: the first reason most people believe (Psalm 19:1-4)
2. The Human Person: human beings (CCC 33-35)
 - a. Openness to Truth and Beauty:
 - b. Sense of Moral goodness: existence of right/wrong (→Perfect Goodness)
 - c. Freedom: human beings are persons (someone, not something)
 - d. Voice of Conscience: innate sense that some things are good/evil
 - e. Longings for the Infinite: this world is not enough
 - f. “Seeds of Eternity”→existence of “Spiritual soul”
 - g. Only man and woman created in “image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:27-28)
 - h. These “proofs” ≠ faith; show faith not opposed to reason
3. Divine Revelation: God not only exists, he has spoken/acted in history (CCC 156)
 - a. “Motives of Credibility”: reasons for believing that God has revealed himself
 - b. Three Motives: (1) Miracles, (2) Prophecies, and (3) existence of the Church
 - c. These motives: show faith is not “a blind impulse of the mind” (CCC 156)
 - d. We’ll look at miracles and church later; for now, I want to focus on Prophecy
 - e. Genesis 22:1-14: the Sacrifice of Isaac

Sacrifice of Isaac

1. Father Abraham offers belvd. Son
2. Son carries wood of his sacrifice
3. Up the mountain of Moriah
4. All families of the earth blessed

Passion of Jesus Christ

1. God the Father offers belvd. Son
2. Son carries the wood of the cross
3. Up the mountain of Calvary
4. All families of the earth blessed

Conclusion

1. Reasons to Believe: God exists; human beings are made for more (CCC 34)
2. Motives of Credibility: this God has revealed himself in salvation history (CCC 156)

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Do you know anyone who has left the Church and now refers to themselves as an “atheist” or “agnostic”? What reasons do they give for not believing in God?

2. What arguments for the existence of God do you find the most convincing? Why?

3. What do you think of the parallels between the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 and the passion and death of Jesus? What do they reveal about the difference between Jesus and other religious leaders?

Does God Exist? Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997. See CCC 26-49 (Ways of Coming to Know God), CCC 142-65 (on Faith and Reason).
2. Brandon Vogt. *Why I am Catholic (And You Should Be Too)*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2017.
3. Trent Horn. *Answering Atheism: How to Make the Case for God with Logic and Charity*. San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2013.
4. Peter J. Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, SJ. *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics: Reasoned Answers to Questions of Faith*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009.

5. Scott Hahn, *Catholic Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 2009. See pp. 317-24 (“God”).
6. John Bergsma. *Yes, There is a God: And Other Answers to Life’s Big Questions*. Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us, 2017. A great resource for teens and young people.

2. Is Jesus God?

Introduction

1. Ok, so maybe God exists; but why should we believe that *Jesus* is God?
2. Many opinions about Jesus: (1) Prophet, (2) Good Teacher, (3) Religious Founder
3. C. S. Lewis: Jesus only left us three options (*Mere Christianity*)
 - a. Liar: Jesus claimed to be God, but knew he wasn’t
 - b. Lunatic: Jesus thought he was God, but was mistaken
 - c. Lord: Jesus was who he claimed to be; God come in the flesh
4. Skeptics today: 4th option, “Legend”?
 - a. Admit Jesus is divine in the Gospel of John
 - b. Claim Jesus is merely *human* in three earlier Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke)
5. Jesus is divine in the Gospel of John:
 - a. “Before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58-59; cf. Exod 3:14; stoning response)
 - b. “I am the Father are One” (John 10:30-33; cf. “you make yourself God”)
6. Jesus claims to be God in *all four* Gospels; but does it in a *Jewish way* (CCC 589-90)

The Divinity of Jesus

1. The Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:3-12; cf. Matt 9:2-8; Luke 5:18-26)
 - a. “My son, your sins are forgiven”
 - b. “It is *blasphemy*! Who can forgive sins *but God alone*?”
 - c. “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”
 - d. Old Testament: “Son of Man” is a heavenly being (Dan 7:13-14)
2. The Walking on Water (Mark 6:45-52; cf. Matt 15:22-33; John 6:15-21)
 - a. “Take heart, I am (Greek *egō eimi*); have no fear”
 - b. Old Testament: God reveals his name—“I Am”—to Moses (Exod 3:14-15)
3. The Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-9; cf. Matt 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36)
 - a. Why Moses and Elijah?
 - b. Old Testament: Moses & Elijah on Mount Sinai (Exod 33:18-23; 1 Kgs 19:13)
4. The Death of Jesus: crucified for “Blasphemy” (Mark 14:61-64; cf. Dan 7:13-14)
5. The Resurrection of Jesus: Why did anyone believe? (Three main reasons)
 - a. The Empty Tomb (Luke 24:1-2)
 - b. The Bodily Appearances of Jesus (Luke 24:36-42)
 - c. The Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy (1 Cor 15:3)?

- 6. Jesus and the “Sign of Jonah” (Matt 12:38-41)
 - a. Old Testament: Jonah *dies* and goes to “Sheol”/realm of dead (Jonah 2:2-10)
 - b. Prophecy of Gentiles’ Conversion (Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, 1.6.20-21)

Conclusion

- 1. Jesus is not just one more religious leader; Jesus is the *only* religious founder who
 - a. Was pre-announced by prophecy (cf. Buddha, Mohammed)
 - b. Claimed to be divine
 - c. Proved his divinity through miracles, resurrection, and conversion of Gentiles
- 2. Why does it matter? The Divinity of Jesus and the Death of Christ (CCC 616)
 - a. “He knew and loved us all when he offered his life” (CCC 616)
 - b. “He loved *me* and gave himself for *me*” (Gal 2:20)
 - c. “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8)

Discussion and Reflection Questions

- 1. Do you know anyone who has left the Church who says they no longer believe in Jesus? What reasons do they give for not believing Jesus is God?

- 2. What evidence for the divinity of Jesus did you find most compelling? Why?

- 3. Why does the divinity of Jesus matter? What difference does it make for how we understand his death and resurrection? How he is different from other religious leaders?

Is Jesus God? Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997. See CCC 422-682 (the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ).
2. Brant Pitre. *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*. New York: Image, 2016.
3. Brant Pitre. *The Case for Jesus DVD*. Visit: <https://goo.gl/a2Joct>
4. Brandon Vogt. *Why I am Catholic (And You Should Be Too)*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2017. See pp. 41-54
5. Peter J. Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, SJ. *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics: Reasoned Answers to Questions of Faith*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009. See pp. 159-210 (The Divinity of Christ)

3. Peter and the Papacy

Introduction

1. Common Questions:
 - a. “Why do Catholics follow the Pope?”
 - b. “Where is the word ‘Pope’ in the Bible?”
 - c. “Isn’t the papacy just a ‘medieval invention’?”
 - d. “How can you claim that the Pope is *infallible* when he is a sinner?”
2. Peter, the Papacy, and Infallibility (see CCC 880-882, 891-892)
 - a. Jesus did not just claim to be God
 - b. He also founded one Church, which he founded on Peter, head of the Apostles
 - c. He established the office of the papacy = the successors of Peter
 - d. Peter’s successor (the Pope) = the visible leader of the one Church on earth
 - e. Whenever the Pope defines a doctrine of faith or morals, it is free from error
3. Where is any of this in the Bible?

The Biblical Roots of the Papacy

1. Simon Peter, the “Rock”: Peter’s confession of Faith (Matt 16:13-18)
 - a. Name Change: “You are ‘Peter’, and on this Rock, I will build my Church”
 - b. Greek *Petros* = “Rock”; Aramaic *Cephas* = “Rock” (cf. Gal 1:18)
 - c. Rock = Foundation Stone in the Temple (Hebrew *'eben shetiyah*)
 - d. Church = “Assembly” (Greek *Ekklēsia*); Jesus institutes *one* church (cf. Israel)

- e. Keys of the Kingdom = Prime Minister, 2nd only to the King (Isa 22:19-23)
 - f. Notice: Prime Minister is a “father” to the people (cf. Italian *papa*)
 - g. Power to “Bind and Loose” = Supreme teaching/spiritual authority
 - h. Cf. the Pharisees: sit on Moses’ “seat” (Greek *kathedra*) (Matt 23:1)
 - i. Note: Peter’s infallible teaching authority, *not impeccability*
2. Peter, the “Shepherd” of the “One Flock” (John 21:15-19)
 - a. Jesus makes Peter the “Shepherd”: “Tend (Greek *poimainō*) my sheep” (21:16)
 - b. “There shall be *one flock, one shepherd*” (John 10:16)
 3. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-12)
 - a. Debate over whether circumcision is necessary for salvation
 - b. How do they settle the debate? They held a *church council*
 - c. Peter: we are “saved” by “grace” through “faith” (Acts 15:11, 9)
 - d. Response to Peter’s decree: “all the assembly *kept silence*”
 4. The Papacy in the Early Church: St. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.3.2-3; ca. 180 AD)
 - a. “Every Church should agree with this Church” = Church of Rome
 - b. Because it has “pre-eminent authority” over “the faithful everywhere”
 - c. The “office” of Peter → Pope “Eleutherius,” 12th successor “from the apostles”

Conclusion

1. Jesus founded *one* Church with *one* Shepherd (CCC 813-822)
2. Jesus appointed Peter the “Rock” upon which he would build his Church (CCC 881)
3. Jesus gave Peter supreme authority to teach and govern the Church (CCC 882)
4. Jesus gave Peter an “office” that would passed down after his death (CCC 882)
5. The Pope = successor of Peter; Bishops = successors to the Apostles (CCC 884-86)
6. Papal Infallibility: defining doctrines of faith or morals (CCC 891)

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Do you know anyone who rejects the authority of the Pope? What are their reasons for doing so?

2. Why does Jesus give Peter alone the “keys of the kingdom of heaven”? What would this have meant in a first-century Jewish setting?

3. What is the difference between papal *infallibility* and personal impeccability? When exactly is the Pope infallible?

Peter and the Papacy: Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997. See CCC 880-896 (the Pope and Bishops)
2. Brant Pitre. *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Papacy*. DVD Presentation. Visit: <https://goo.gl/nV8iJp>
3. Tim Gray. *Peter: Keys to Following Jesus*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2016.
4. Patrick Madrid. *Pope Fiction: Answers to 30 Myths & Misconceptions about the Papacy*. Basilica Press, 2016.
5. Scott Hahn, *Catholic Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 2009. See 670-72 (“Papal Primacy”).

4. How We Got the Bible

Introduction: Common Questions

1. Where is *that* in the Bible? “I believe in the Bible *alone*” (Latin *sola Scriptura*)
2. Why did the Catholic Church *add* books to the Bible?
 - a. Protestant Bible: 66 Books (39 OT, 27 NT)
 - b. Catholic Bible: 73 Books (46 OT, 27 NT) (Which is the ‘real’ Bible?)
3. Why should I believe the Bible at all? Where did it come from, anyway?
4. What does the Catholic Church teach about Sacred Scripture?

Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition

1. As Catholics, We Believe: the Bible is the Inspired Word of God

- a. “The Word of God”—fully human, fully divine (CCC 101)
 - b. God is the author of Scripture (CCC 105)
 - c. “The inspired books teach *the truth*” (CCC 107; cf. CCC 110, “literary genres”)
 - d. Jesus believed the Bible (Matt 5:17-18; Mark 12:36; John 8:35; Luke 24:25)
 - e. St. Paul believed the Bible (2 Tim 3:16-17: “All Scripture is inspired by God”)
 - f. “Inspired” (Greek *theopneustos*, literally ‘God-breathed’)
 - g. Result: the Church has always “venerated” Scripture (CCC 103; cf. 2 Kisses)
2. However, Catholics don’t believe in “the Bible alone” (Latin *sola Scriptura*)
 - a. Why not? Because that’s not what the Bible teaches!
 - b. St. Paul on Scripture *and* Apostolic Tradition (2 Thess 2:15)
 - c. “Hold fast to the traditions (Greek *paradosis*) which you were taught by us”
 - d. Whether by “word of mouth” (Oral) or by “letter” (Written)
 - e. St. Peter rejects the Bible Alone (2 Pet 1:20-21)
 - f. “No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation”
 - g. Therefore: “Pay attention to” the teaching of the Apostles
 - h. Some “twist” the letters of Paul and the other “Scriptures” (2 Pet 3:16)
3. The Origin of the Bible: Apostolic Tradition and the Catholic Church
 - a. Nowhere is the role of tradition clearer than in the Canon of Scripture
 - b. Canon: “rule” or “measure”; official ‘table of contents’ of the Bible
 - c. The Bible did not fall from heaven; no inspired “table of contents”
 - d. How do you know which books belong in the Bible? (DSS? ‘Lost’ Gospels?)
 - e. E.g., How do you know Revelation is the word of God? (Bible doesn’t tell you)
 - f. “It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church” discerned canon (CCC 120)
 - g. Catholic Canon of Scripture: 46 Books (OT), 27 Books (NT)
 - h. Councils of Rome (382 AD), Florence (1442 AD), and Trent (1546 AD)
 - i. The Catholic Church did not *add* books to the Bible
 - j. Protestant Reformers: e.g., Martin Luther, took 7 books *out* of OT (cf. KJV!)
 - h. The Catholic Church *gave us* the Bible

Conclusion

1. The Bible is inspired Word of God: the Scriptures teach the Truth (Jesus taught so)
2. Catholics believe in both Scripture *and* Tradition: not the Bible alone
3. The Catholic Church that *gave us* the Scriptures: the Bible is a Catholic book!
4. The Church did not add books to the Bible; she has always accepted 73 Books

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever known anyone who called themselves a “Bible Only” Christian? What questions did they ask you about the Catholic faith? How did you answer?

2. Why does the Catholic Church only read *one book* during Mass? What does it mean to say that the Bible is “inspired” by God?

3. Have you ever wondered how we got the Bible? What about the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ‘lost Gospels’? What role did the Catholic Church play in giving us the Scriptures?

How We Got the Bible: Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997. See CCC 74-133 (on Scripture and Tradition).
2. Benedict XVI. *The Word of the Lord*, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (Sept 30, 2010). Available at www.vatican.va.
3. Brant Pitre. *The Origin of the Bible*. Audio/DVD Presentation. Visit: <https://goo.gl/y5LXa4>
4. Scott Hahn, *Catholic Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday, 2009. See pp. 136-140 (“Canon of the Bible”).

5. The Eucharist: Jesus' Real Presence?

Introduction: Common Questions

1. Do you believe the bread and wine at Mass really become Jesus' "body" and "blood"?
2. If the Eucharist is really Jesus' body and blood, wouldn't that be *cannibalism*?
3. Many non-Catholics believe the Eucharist is just a "symbol" or spiritual "presence"
4. Why do Catholics put so much emphasis on the Eucharist? (e.g., Daily Mass?)
5. What does the Catholic Church Teach?
 - a. The Eucharist: Greek word "thanksgiving" (CCC 1328)
 - b. Real Presence: *unique* presence: "body, blood, soul, and divinity" (CCC 1374)
 - c. Transubstantiation: 'no more bread and wine'; only appearances (CCC 1376)

The Biblical Roots of the Eucharist

1. The Last Supper (Matt 26:26-28)
 - a. Jesus says: "Take, eat; this *is* my Body" (not this 'symbolizes' my body)
 - b. Context: Jewish Passover Meal (cf. Matt 26:17-19, they "prepare" Passover)
 - c. First Passover: you had to "eat" the "flesh" of the lamb (Exod 12:8)
 - d. Jewish Passover: both a meal and a sacrifice (Priests, altar, sanctuary, candles)
 - e. If Jesus is true Passover "Lamb," then *you have to eat his flesh* (1 Cor 5:7)
2. Jesus' Teaching on His Real Presence: the New Manna (John 6:52-59)
 - a. Jesus says: "I am the bread of life... the bread *is my flesh*" (6:51)
 - b. The Jews' Question: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (6:52)
 - c. Jesus does not back down "Unless you eat my flesh *and drink my blood*..."
 - d. "My flesh is food indeed, my blood is drink indeed" (6:55)
 - e. Response: many disciples left, but not Peter and the Twelve
 - f. The key: Jesus is the new Manna from heaven
 - g. Old Testament: manna is *miraculous bread from heaven* (Exod 16)
 - h. The Our Father: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11)
3. Saint Paul and the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist
 - a. A real "communion" in the "body" and "blood" of Christ (1 Cor 10:16)
 - b. "Unworthy" communion "profanes" the body/blood (1 Cor 11:27-28)
 - c. Therefore, we must "examine" ourselves before receiving
 - d. Anyone "conscious" of "grave sin"; must first go to Confession (CCC 1385)

Conclusion

1. The Eucharist: Sacrifice, Real Presence, Transubstantiation (cf. CCC 1356-1381)
2. Adoration: we don't just believe, we *worship* the Eucharist (CCC 1378)
 - a. Elevation: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world..."
 - b. Genuflection: the Eucharist in the Tabernacle or Monstrance (CCC 1379)
 - c. Personal Presence: the Eucharist is not *something*, the Eucharist is *someone*
3. The Eucharist is "the source and the summit" of the Christian life (CCC 1324)
 - a. Thanksgiving: Jesus died/rose for us; we go to "give thanks" for his death

- b. Sacrifice: we *offer* ourselves in union with Christ’s sacrifice (CCC 1368)
- c. Communion: if we have examined our conscience, we go to *receive* Jesus
- d. Sunday Obligation: fulfillment of the Sabbath (CCC 2174-76, 2180-81)
- e. Daily Bread: we are still in the desert; foretaste of the true Promise Land

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Do you know anyone who has rejected the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist? What were their reasons for doing so?

2. Why did Jesus institute the Eucharist during the Jewish Passover meal? What did the Jewish people have to do in order to complete the sacrifice of the Passover lamb?

3. Why does the Bible say we have to examine our consciences before we receive the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 11:27-28)? What difference does it make?

4. The *Catechism* teaches that the Eucharist is “the source and the summit of the Christian life” (CCC 1324). Is it the “source and summit” of your life? If not, why not? How might you grow in devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist?

The Eucharist: Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997. See CCC 1322-1419 (on the Sacrament of the Eucharist).
2. Benedict XVI. *Sacrament of Charity*, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007). Available at www.vatican.va.
3. Brant Pitre. *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*. New York: Image, 2011.
4. Brant Pitre. *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*. Audio/DVD Presentation. Visit: <https://goo.gl/rvEwTC>
5. Scott Hahn. *The Lamb's Supper: the Mass as Heaven on Earth*. New York: Doubleday, 1997.

6. Why Confess to a Priest?

Introduction

1. Why should I have to confess my sins to a priest?
2. Why can't I just go directly to God?
3. Where are “priests” and “confession” in the Bible?
4. The Answer: according to the Bible itself
 - a. Jesus' ministry was focused on forgiving sins
 - b. Jesus gave the Apostles his power to forgive or retain sins
 - c. Confession: the “ordinary way” of reconciliation with God (CCC 1484)

The Biblical Roots of Confession

1. Jesus' Ministry of Forgiving Sins
 - a. The Healing of the Paralytic: “My son, *your sins are forgiven*” ([Mark 2:1-12](#))
 - b. Scribes' Response: “Who can forgive sins but *God alone*?”
 - c. Old Testament: sins forgiven in Temple, through a priest (Lev 4-5; Num 5)
 - d. Visible Miracle: “rise... and walk” → Invisible Miracle: forgiveness
 - e. The Sinful Woman: “*Your sins are forgiven, go in peace*” ([Luke 7:47-50](#))
2. Jesus gave the Apostles the power to forgive and retain sins ([John 20:21-23](#))
 - a. First thing Jesus does after Resurrection: institutes the sacrament of confession
 - b. “As the Father has *sent* me, so I *send* you” (cf. Greek *apostolos*)
 - c. “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven”
 - d. “If you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Who has this power?)
 - e. How can they “retain” sins if they do not hear them? (Presupposes confession)
3. Confession to the “Elders” in the Early Church ([James 5:13-16](#))
 - a. “Confess your sins to one another”—Who?
 - b. Context: “Call the elders (Greek *presbyteroi*)” (cf. English word ‘priest’)
 - c. Anointing of the Sick: “let them pray over him, anointing him...”
 - d. Result: “If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”
 - e. Sacraments of Healing: Confession & Anointing of the Sick (CCC 1420-1532)
4. The Bible: not all sins equal; some “mortal,” some not ([1 John 5:16-17](#); cf. CCC 1854)

- a. Venial Sin: “sin which is not mortal”; weakens charity (CCC 1855)
- b. Mortal Sin: “there is sin which is mortal”; destroys charity (CCC 1855)
- c. Mortal Sin: necessitates receiving “sacrament of reconciliation” (CCC 1856)

Conclusion

1. Why should I confess my sins to a priest?
 - a. Because *Jesus* gave the apostles (and their successors) power to forgive
 - b. Because the Bible teaches us to “confess” our sins to the “elders” (*presbyteroi*)
2. Why does Jesus give them this power? Not b/c *he* needs it, but b/c *we* do
 - a. Human Nature: serious sin → asking for forgiveness, face-to-face
 - b. 2nd Precept: “you shall confess your sins at least once a year” (CCC 2042)
 - c. Venial Sins: confess also; Eucharist “wipes away venial sins” (CCC 1394)
3. The *Catechism* on Confession: “the only ordinary way” of reconciliation (CCC 1484)
 - a. The Priest: stands in the place of Jesus; it is *Jesus* who absolves you
 - b. In Confession: the priest is like Jesus; you are like the Paralytic
 - c. Jesus says to *you*: “My child, your sins are forgiven,” “rise” and “walk”!

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever wondered asked the question: “Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest? Why can’t I go straight to God?” What is the answer?

2. When did Jesus give his Apostles the power to “forgive” and “retain” sins? Why do you think this was so important to Jesus if he had already died for the sins of the world?

3. What is the difference between “mortal” and “venial” sin? Why did Jesus establish the sacrament of confession for the forgiveness of mortal sin?

4. How is participation in confession like Jesus' healing of the paralytic? How does sin paralyze us spiritually?

Confession: Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997. See CCC 1420-1498 (on the Sacrament of Penance/Confession).
2. Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. *Confession: the Sacrament of Mercy*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015.
3. Brant Pitre. *Why Do I Have to Go to Confession?* Audio Presentation. Visit: <https://goo.gl/BpwV71>
4. Scott Hahn. *Lord, Have Mercy: The Healing Power of Confession*. New York: Doubleday, 2003. A fantastic, easy to read explanation of Confession. An excellent gift for those who have been away from the sacrament for many years.

7. Do Catholics Worship Mary?

Introduction

1. Do Catholics worship Mary? Why pray to Mary when she's only a human being?
2. Why do you have statues of Mary in your churches? Isn't this idolatry?
3. Why say the Rosary, when Jesus says not to multiply "empty phrases" in prayer?
4. In this presentation, we'll look at the biblical roots of Catholic devotion to Mary
5. Before we begin, a few key principles from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:
 - a. What Church believes about Mary → Church believes about Christ (CCC 487)
 - b. Catholics do not *worship* Mary: "devotion" vs. "adoration" (CCC 971)
 - c. Marian Prayer: "express this *devotion* to the Virgin Mary" (CCC 971)

The Biblical Roots of Devotion to Mary

1. Who is Mary in the New Testament?
 - a. Spouse of Joseph and Virgin Mother of Jesus (Matt 1:18-25)
 - b. Mother of God = "Mother of my Lord" (Greek *kyrios*) (Luke 1:43)
 - c. The *Queen Mother* of the Kingdom of God (cf. "Hail, Holy Queen")
2. The Queen Mother in the Old Testament:

- a. Queen of the Kingdom: *not* the King’s wife, but his mother (1000-587 B.C.)
 - b. “Queen Mother”: Hebrew *Gebirah* (meaning “Great Lady”)
 - c. She wore a “crown” (Jer 13:18); sat on a “throne” at King’s “right hand”
 - d. She was honored by the King himself (Solomon bows to Queen Bathsheba)
 - e. She was a powerful intercessor/advocate for the people (1 Kings 2:19-20)
3. Mary in the New Testament
- a. Gabriel: Jesus will sit on David’s “throne” (Luke 1:31-33)
 - b. Jewish Perspective: If Jesus is the King, then *Mary is the Queen Mother*
 - c. Magnificat: He has “exalted those of low degree” (Luke 1:46-48, 52)
4. The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Revelation 12:1-5)
- a. Child = Jesus
 - b. Dragon = Satan
 - c. Woman = Mary, mother of the Messiah
 - d. She is “in heaven”; she wears a “crown of twelve stars” = Queen (Psalm 45:9)

Conclusion

1. Mary was “exalted by the Lord as *Queen over all things*” (CCC 966)
2. Veneration: Mary is worthy of honor; Jesus “honors” her, so should we! (Exod 20:12)
3. Statues: Mary is in heaven; we remember her (cf. statues of Presidents)
 - a. Old Testament: Cherubim on the Ark (Exod 25:10-22; 1 Kings 6:23-28)
 - b. “Veneration” of Images ≠ Idolatry (CCC 2132)
4. Intercession: Mary is our advocate with the King; she intercedes for us (CCC 2673-76)
 - a. Elders in heaven offer “the prayers of the saints”/incense to God (Rev 5:8)
 - b. John the Apostle: talks to “one of the elders” in heaven (Rev 7:13-14)!
5. The Rosary: meditating on the mysteries of Jesus’ life with Mary (CCC 2676-78)
 - a. Jesus condemned “empty phrases” (Matt 6:7), not *all* repetition (cf. Matt 26:44)
 - b. Our Father: biblical prayer (Matt 6:9-13)
 - c. Hail Mary: words of Gabriel (Luke 1:28) and words of Elizabeth (Luke 1:42)
6. The *Catechism* on Prayer to Mary and Welcoming Her into our Homes (CCC 2679)

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever been asked by someone: “Why do you worship Mary?” How did you respond?

2. Who was the “Queen Mother” in Old Testament times? How is she similar to the Virgin Mary?

3. Why do Catholic Churches have statues of Mary when the Old Testament forbids “idolatry” (cf. CCC 2132)?

4. How is the Rosary a “biblical” prayer? What passages in the Bible do the Our Father and Hail Mary come from?

Do Catholics Worship Mary?: Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997.
See CCC 487-511, 963-975, and 2673-82 (on Mary).
2. John Paul II. *Mother of the Redeemer*, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987). Available at www.vatican.va.
3. Brant Pitre. *Mother of the Messiah*. Audio Presentation. Visit: <https://goo.gl/vBH4dn>
3. Scott Hahn. *Hail, Holy Queen: the Mother of God in the Word of God*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.
4. Tim Staples. *Behold Your Mother: A Biblical and Historical Defense of the Marian Doctrines*. San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2016.

8. Purgatory and Prayers for the Dead

Introduction

1. Where is the word “Purgatory” in the Bible?
2. What *is* Purgatory? A ‘Second Chance’? A ‘Halfway-House’ b/w Heaven and Hell?
3. Why do Catholics pray for the dead?
4. What does the Catholic Church actually teach about Purgatory? (see CCC 1031-32)

The Biblical Roots of Purgatory

1. Jesus' teaching on Life after Death:
 - a. Jesus taught about "Heaven/Eternal Life" (Matt 25:46; Mark 10:17-31)
 - b. Jesus and "Hell/Eternal Fire" (Matt 25:41; Mark 9:43-45)
 - c. What about Purgatory? Where is that in the Bible?
2. The Old Testament: Praying for the Dead (2 Macc 12:43-45)
 - a. Context: Jewish soldiers have died in battle, wearing "sacred tokens" of idols
 - b. Judas "took up a collection" of silver; to offer a sacrifice in the Temple
 - c. It was a "holy and pious" action to "pray for the dead" → the Resurrection
 - d. "He made atonement for the dead" → Forgiveness for sin after death
 - e. Problem: this is only in the Catholic OT; What about the NT?
2. Jesus and Purgatory: the Spiritual "Prison" (Matt 5:23-26)
 - a. Conflict between you and "your brother"
 - b. First be "reconciled with your brother," then come "offer your gift"
 - c. Otherwise, your Accuser → Judge → Guards → "Prison"
 - d. "Truly, I say to you, you will never get out *until you have paid the last penny*"
 - e. Jewish Context: Jesus is talking about a *spiritual* "debtor's prison"
 - f. Not heaven: heaven is not a prison
 - g. Not hell: no one ever "gets out" of Hell (cf. CCC 1035)
 - h. Temporary: placing of paying off debt (being purified of sin)
 - i. Ancient Christians: Tertullian (2nd cent. AD), Origen (3rd cent. AD)
3. Paul and Purgatory: Being "Saved" Through "Fire" (1 Cor 3:11-15)
 - a. Context: Paul is using the Analogy of a Temple
 - b. Foundation = Jesus Christ
 - c. Good Works = gold, silver, precious stones (purified by the fire)
 - d. Poor Works = wood, hay, stubble (burned up in the fire)
 - e. What is this "fire" St. Paul speaks of?
 - f. Not heaven: those in heaven do not "suffer" (cf. CCC 1023-29)
 - g. Not hell: those in hell are not "saved" (cf. CCC 1033-37)
 - h. Third Place: later called "purgatory" (cf. "fire" of God's love; cf. Heb 12:29)

Conclusion

1. The *Catechism* on Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory (see CCC 1020-1037)
2. What is Purgatory? Who goes there? (CCC 1030)
 - a. All who "die in God's grace" but "still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030)
 - b. Are indeed "assured of their eternal salvation"; but undergo "purification,"
 - c. To achieve "the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (cf. Rev 21:27)
3. Purgatory ≠ Hell: "Entirely different" from "punishment of the damned" (CCC 1031)
4. For the Dead: offer prayers, penances, and esp. the Eucharistic sacrifice (CCC 1032)

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever met someone who struggled with or questioned the Church’s teaching on Purgatory? What were their reasons?

2. Many people don’t believe in Heaven and Hell these days. What did Jesus teach about Heaven and Hell?

3. What exactly is Purgatory? Where do Jesus and Paul teach about the reality of Purgatory?

4. Why should we pray for the dead if they are assured of their salvation?

Purgatory and Prayers for the Dead: Resources

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997.
See CCC 1020-37 (Heaven, Hell, Purgatory)
2. Benedict XVI. *Saved in Hope*, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (November 30, 2007), esp nos. 47-48. Available at www.vatican.va.
3. Brant Pitre. *The Jewish Roots of Purgatory*. Audio Presentation. Visit: <https://goo.gl/sejoCE>

3. St. Francis de Sales. *The Catholic Controversy: A Defense of the Faith*. Charlotte: Tan, 1989. See pp. 261-82. A classic explanation of Purgatory by a Doctor of the Church and patron saint of the Houma-Thibodaux diocese.