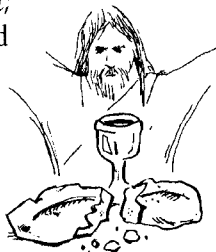


## Why do Catholics do that?



### Why do Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ?

This is a great mystery of our faith but Jesus' words are clear: *"Take and eat; this is my body"* and *"... this is my blood of the covenant"* (Matthew 26:26-28). And he reiterates it, *"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink"* (John 6:55).



When the priest consecrates the bread and wine, a change takes place. They become Jesus' body and blood. The Eucharist is then "true food," just as Jesus intended.

### Why do we fast before Holy Communion?

In the Old Testament, people fasted before coming into God's presence or doing a special job for him. For example, Elijah fasted on the way to Mount Horeb to meet

God. Moses fasted when he received the Ten Commandments. So we follow this tradition and fast before meeting Christ in the Eucharist.

Fasting from food or drink one hour before receiving Holy Communion also creates a physical hunger and adds to our spiritual appetite for the Bread of Life.

### Why does the priest wash his hands during Mass?

In the early Church, people may have offered gifts such as live poultry or fresh fish during Mass, in addition to bread and wine. That made it necessary for the priest to wash his hands after receiving them.



Now, the priest washes his hands to symbolize his desire for purity of heart as he approaches the central part of the Mass. As he washes his hands, he prays, *"... wash away my iniquity ... cleanse me from my sin."*

### Why do Catholics attend Mass on Holy Days of Obligation?

Busy lives can distract us from God or cause us to become numb to his presence. Holy days of Obligation help us to remember that we belong first and foremost to God. These holy days give us time to meditate, mark, and celebrate special holy events through the celebration of the Mass.

Holy Days of Obligation include Christmas, the Ascension of Our Lord, Mary's Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, All Saints Day, and each Sunday.

### Why do we say the Nicene Creed at Mass?

The original Nicene Creed was issued by the Council of Nicaea in 323 in response to Arian heresy. Led by Arius, Arians believed that the Son of God was not truly divine but was created. This creed was the Church's response.

Today, the Nicene Creed summarizes what Christians truly believe and we pray it at Mass after

the Word of God is proclaimed. It is our positive response to all that the Scriptures ask us to do and believe.

### Why do we have images of saints in our churches?

Stained-glass windows and statues of saints and martyrs have long served as teaching tools and spiritual aids for Catholics. For example, many members of the early Church couldn't read and the images helped tell the stories of the heroic love of Mary and the saints.



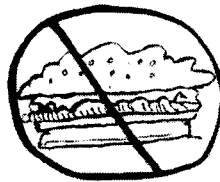
Having these reminders in church also helps us reflect on our own faith. They call us to better efforts at holiness, and help us honor God who gives us the grace to keep trying for saintliness.

### Why are some saints celebrated one year but not the next?

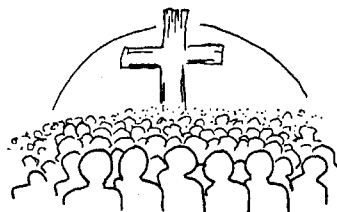
Once a saint always a saint. After Vatican II, the calendar of feast days was altered to represent a greater variety of saints. The old calendar featured mostly Europeans, especially French and Italian Saints. To introduce saints from Asia, Africa and the Americas, the Church "traded" feasts for some saints. But those holy men and women from the old calendar are still saints – they just don't all have a world-wide commemoration on the current calendar.

### Why do Catholics abstain from meat on Fridays?

To Catholics, every Sunday is an Easter celebration and each Friday commemorates Jesus' sacrifice on Good Friday. To honor the Cross and to atone for our sins, the Church asks that we make Friday a day of penance.



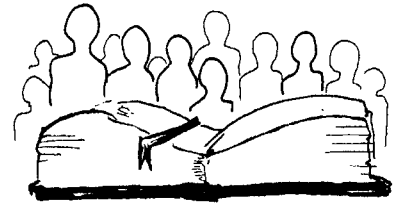
One common Friday penance is abstaining from meat. Since trading meat for fish may not be a real sacrifice for many of us, the bishops allow us to substitute another meaningful sacrifice. The self-denial and discomfort helps us share in Jesus' suffering on the Cross.



### Why do Catholics rely on the Catechism?

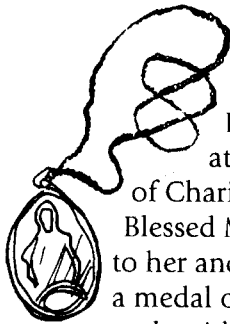
The objective of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is to authentically teach the Catholic faith. The *Catechism* reiterates beliefs long held and defined by the Church, and it also gives Catholic guidance on moral issues of our day.

The *Catechism* is meant to be studied and used by each of us to better know our faith. Every Catholic home needs one next to the Bible as a faithful representation of the living faith handed down to us through the generations.



### Why do some Catholics wear Miraculous Medals?

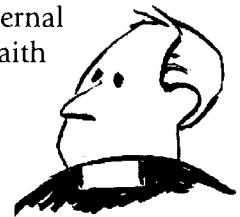
The devotion of the Miraculous Medal began in 1830 with St. Catherine Laboure, a novice at the Daughters of Charity in Paris. The Blessed Mother appeared to her and asked to have a medal of her image made with the words, "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee" engraved on it.



With the approval of the archbishop of Paris, the first medals were struck in 1832. This devotion to our Blessed Mother continues today.

### Why do priests wear a special collar?

Catholic clergy have always been asked to dress in such a way as to provide an external witness to their faith and their role in the Church. But it wasn't until the 1800s that priests in the U.S. regularly wore the Roman collar.



Today, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops instructs, "Outside liturgical functions, a black suit and Roman collar are the usual attire for a priest." Thus, a man wearing a Roman collar in the U.S. can be identified as a Catholic priest.