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## THE PRECEPTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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*"He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.'"*(Matthew 22:37-40, NABRE)

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# The Precepts of the Catholic Church

The **Precepts of the Catholic Church** are essential guidelines that connect the moral and spiritual life of Catholics with the Church's liturgical practices. As outlined in the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and supported by additional information provided, the precepts are positive laws decreed by the Church's pastoral authorities, aiming to ensure the faithful observe the "*very necessary minimum*" for spiritual and moral growth. They act as a foundation for a life of holiness, which is nourished by the Eucharist and other sacraments. The Church further specifies that failure to attend Mass on Sundays or holy days without a grave reason constitutes a serious sin (CCC 2181).

## 1. Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation

The first precept, "*You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation,*" stresses the importance of the Eucharistic celebration. This precept requires Catholics to participate in the liturgical life of the Church by commemorating the Resurrection of Christ through Mass. The liturgy, as described, is essential to both the moral and spiritual lives of Catholics, grounding them in the love of God and neighbor (CCC 2048). By attending Mass, Catholics receive Christ in the Eucharist, which nourishes their souls and strengthens their moral life (CCC 1324).

## 2. Confess Your Sins at Least Once a Year

The second precept, "*You shall confess your sins at least once a year,*" encourages Catholics to participate regularly in the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation). Catholics restore their relationship with God by confessing their sins to a Priest and receiving absolution (CCC 1440). This sacrament, as stated, is vital for maintaining a state of grace, particularly before receiving the Eucharist (CCC 1457). It underscores the Church's role in helping the faithful on their journey of conversion and forgiveness, which began at baptism and ensures ongoing spiritual renewal through Christ's grace (CCC 2042). This precept encourages regular examination of conscience and a humble acknowledgment of one's need for God's mercy

## 3. Receive the Eucharist at Least During the Easter Season

The third precept, "*You shall receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season,*" ensures that Catholics partake in the "**source and summit**" of Christian life. By receiving the Eucharist, especially during the time of Christ's Resurrection, the faithful unite themselves more fully with Christ and the Church, receiving spiritual nourishment necessary for holiness and the Christian life (CCC 2042, 1324; John 6:53-56). Catholics should receive the Eucharist in a state of grace, that is, without being conscious of mortal sin (CCC 1385).

## 4. Observe the Days of Fasting and Abstinence

The fourth precept, "*You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence,*" highlights the importance of self-discipline, detachment from sin, and solidarity with the poor (CCC 1434) which are essential aspects of the Christian life. Fasting and abstinence serve as acts of penance that bring the faithful closer to Christ and His sacrifice. These

practices foster self-control and mastery over one's instincts, contributing to spiritual growth. Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert (Matthew 4:2) is a model for Christians, reminding them of the importance of spiritual preparation and sacrifice in their lives (CCC 1434, 2043).

The Church prescribes fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, and abstinence from meat on Fridays during Lent (Code of Canon Law 1249-1251). These practices remind Catholics of their need for ongoing conversion and imitation of Christ's self-sacrifice. Christ himself teaches the value of fasting as a form of spiritual preparation (Matthew 6:16-18).

## 5. Provide for the Material Needs of the Church

The fifth precept, "*You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church*," calls on Catholics to support the Church according to their abilities. This duty involves contributing time, talent, and financial resources to sustain the Church's ministries and activities, which are essential for the fulfillment of its mission to evangelize and serve others (CCC 2043). St. Paul's teaching, "*The worker deserves his wages*" (1 Timothy 5:18), reflects the responsibility to ensure the Church has the means to continue its work of spreading the Gospel. This obligation can be fulfilled through offerings, donations, and other forms of financial support.

### Context of the Precepts

The precepts, as noted, are established "*in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical worship*" (CCC 2041). They are not merely rules but guidelines that encourage Catholics to live in harmony with the Gospel and grow in their love for God and neighbor. The Church's role in promoting these precepts is part of its divine mandate to "*teach all nations*" and to guide the faithful in their journey toward holiness. As the Church teaches through its Magisterium, the authority of the pope and bishops is to ensure that the faithful grow in moral integrity and spiritual devotion (CCC 2049).

In summary, the **Precepts of the Church** offer Catholics a practical framework for living out their faith. These precepts guarantee a foundation for prayer, moral effort, and participation in the sacraments, all of which are necessary for the growth of love for God and others. By adhering to these guidelines, the faithful are called to deepen their relationship with God and strive for the perfection of love and holiness.

### References:

- Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000.
- Code of Canon Law. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983.
- The Holy Bible, New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).