

What Catholics Believe About Faith

Summary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Paragraphs 142-197)

“Faith lifts the staggering soul on one side, Hope supports it on the other. Experience says it must be, and Love says let it be.”

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

I believe, We believe (CCC #166)

“Faith is a personal act—**the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals Himself**. But faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. **You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life.** The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. **I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith.**”



The Church and Faith (CCC #168-169)

“It is the Church that believes first, and so **bears, nourishes, and sustains my faith.** ... It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism. ... Salvation comes from God alone; but because **we receive the life of faith through the Church, she is our mother:** ‘We believe the Church as the mother of our new birth, and not in the Church as if she were the author of our salvation.’ Because she is our mother, she is also our teacher in the faith.”

“Knowledge of the content of faith is essential for giving one’s own assent, that is to say for adhering fully with intellect and will to what the Church proposes. Knowledge of faith opens a door into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God. The giving of assent implies that, when we believe, we freely accept the whole mystery of faith, because the guarantor of its truth is God who reveals himself and allows us to know his mystery of love.”

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Porta Fidei, 2011

One Faith

“Through the centuries, in so many languages, cultures, peoples, and nations, the Church has **constantly confessed this one faith**, received from the **one Lord**, transmitted by **one Baptism**, and grounded in the conviction that **all people have only one God and Father** (Ephesians 4:4-6). For though languages differ throughout the world, the **content of the Tradition is one and the same.**”

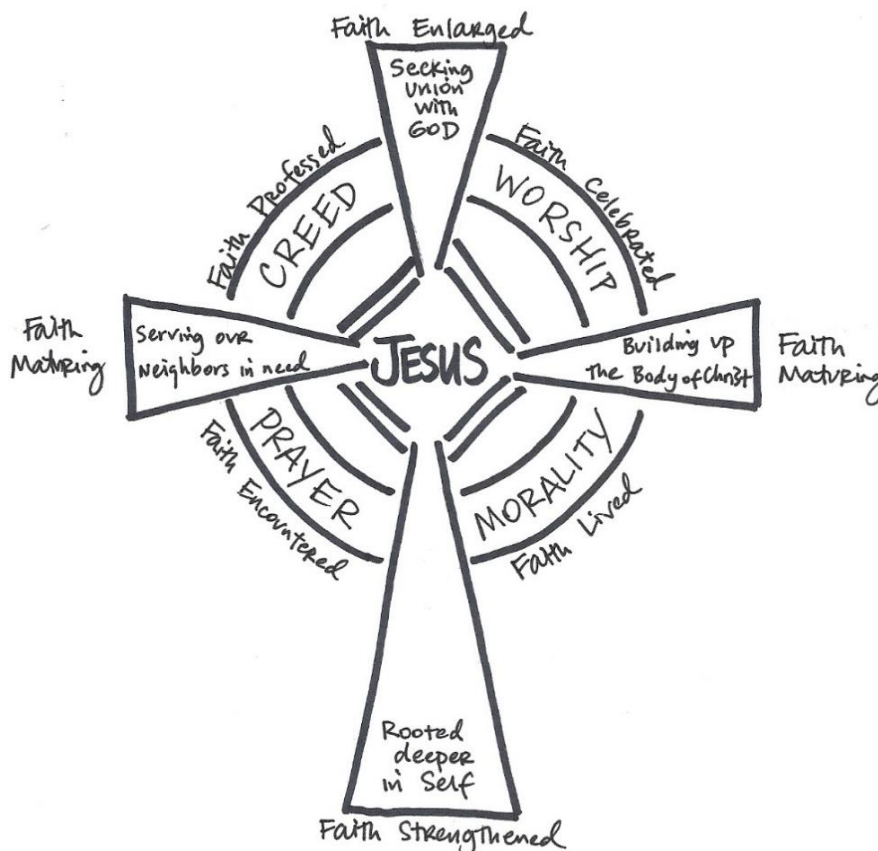
(CCC #172-175)

“Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. Believers, so Saint Augustine tells us, ‘strengthen themselves by believing.’ Only through believing, then, does faith grow and become stronger; there is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one’s life apart from self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God.”

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Porta Fidei, 2011

Four Dimensions and Four Directions of Faith (CCC #13-17)

Faith grows in four different dimensions of faith, and that growth is in four different directions:



To grow, faith must:

1. **Enlarge**—get bigger, encompassing more and more of our lives, our selves
2. **Strengthen**—“bulk up,” withstanding less damage during the ‘storms’ of life’s trials and sufferings
3. **Mature**—come to fruition, bear good fruit in our lives and in the lives of the people we encounter

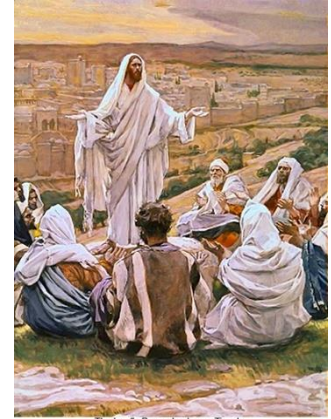
Key Characteristics of Faith (CCC #153-162)

1. Faith is grace—a gift from God, a supernatural virtue

Implication: It's 100% God, receive the gift!

2. Faith is a human act—in faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace

Implication: It's 100% me; faith requires hard work to guard and persevere in it; we have to maintain, cling to and deepen our faith even when we don't feel like it



3. Faith is certain—faith is founded on the very word of God, who cannot lie. We may doubt our ability to understand faith or to respond to it, but we can completely trust in God's truth.

Implication: We plunge into faith, we take the leap of faith—don't wade in tentatively, boldly immerse yourself!

4. Faith seeks understanding—the believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith and to understand better what he has revealed. "I believe in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe." (St. Augustine)

Implication: If your faith is based on true love, you can't help but want to know more about Him. Trepid, lukewarm, 'safe' faith doesn't inspire the desire to know.

5. Faith is a free choice—"Man's response to God by faith must be free, and ... therefore nobody is to be forced to embrace the faith against his will. The act of faith is of its very nature a free act."

Implication: God won't force me to believe, and no one else is responsible for my faith. When I share my faith with others, especially those I love, I cannot force their faith either. 'You can lead a horse to water...'

6. Faith is necessary—Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent Him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining salvation (see Mk 16:16; Jn 3:36; Jn 6:40). For more information about how the Church addresses the salvation of those who do not know Christ, see paragraphs 846-848 of the Catechism.

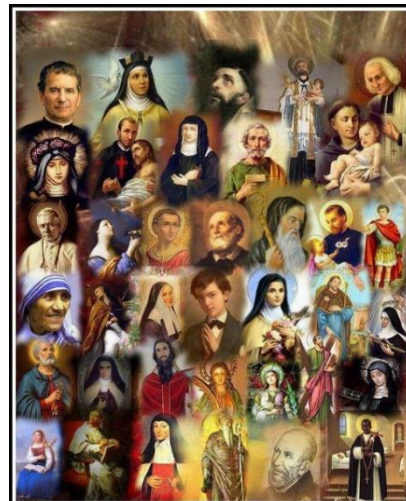
Implication: Faith is the central, critical element of our lives—the 'heart' of the matter. If you won't open a gift you've been given, it won't do you any good: faith is the way we open and receive God's gift of salvation.

7. Faith can be lost—Faith is an entirely free gift that God offers to humankind; we can lose this priceless gift (1 Tim 1:18-19); to live, grow and persevere in the faith requires us to nourish it; God honors our freedom even if we choose to reject Him and damn ourselves—that's an awesome responsibility we have!

Implication: Take care of the gift, there is no "will call" station at the heavenly gates!

8. Faith is the beginning of eternal life—Faith allows us to taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below. Now, however, we walk by faith, not by sight—faith is lived in darkness and can be put to the test; our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death seem to contradict the Good News and can shake our faith. It is then that we turn to the witnesses of our faith—to Abraham, to the Virgin Mary, to so many others who become for us ‘so great a cloud of witnesses’ (Heb 12:1-2).

Implication: Experiencing doubts, spiritual dryness, or a crisis of faith doesn’t mean we are being punished for lack of faith—but these challenges must be addressed through prayer and spiritual guidance. This is not the time to reject or ignore faith because it’s hard to maintain—it is the time to discern our need for purification, or for patient endurance, or for engagement in the spiritual battle.



The Profession of the Christian Faith (CCC #185-197)

“Communion of faith needs a **common language of faith**, normative for all and uniting all in the same confession of faith. From the beginning, the apostolic Church expressed and handed on her faith in brief formulae for all. Such syntheses are called ‘professions of faith’ since **they summarize the faith that Christians profess**. They are called ‘creeds’ on account of what is usually their first word in Latin: *credo* (“**I believe**”).

The Creed is divided into three parts that **define our faith in ONE GOD**:

- The first part speaks of the first divine person (**Father**) and the wonderful works of creation;
- The next part speaks of the second divine person (**Son**) and the mystery of the incarnation and our redemption;
- The final part speaks of the third divine person (**Holy Spirit**), the origin and source of our sanctification.

Examples of creedal statements in the Bible:

- the Shema, the foundation of all creeds: Deuteronomy 6:4
- Jesus’ great commission: Matthew 28:19-20
- Paul’s summaries of the faith: 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:6-11; Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:15-20

Among all the creeds, two occupy a special place in the Church’s life:

- The **Apostle’s Creed** is so called because it is rightly considered to be a faithful summary of the apostle’s faith. It is the ancient baptismal symbol of the Church of Rome;
- The **Nicene Creed** draws its great authority from the fact that it stems from the first two Ecumenical Councils (in 325 and 381). It remains common to all the great Churches of both East and West to this day.



“To say the Credo with faith is to enter into communion with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and also with the whole Church which transmits the faith to us and in whose midst we believe.”

(CCC #197)

The Apostle’s Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, catholic Church,

the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Amen.

“The Church, which has spread everywhere, even to the ends of the earth, **received the faith from the apostles and their disciples.** ... Having **one soul and one heart**, the Church **holds** this faith, **preaches** and **teaches** it consistently as though by a single voice.”

St. Irenaeus, 2nd century

What Damages Faith? (CCC #1815-1816)

“The gift of faith remains in one who has not sinned against it. ... When it is **deprived of hope and love**, faith does not fully unite the believer to Christ and does not make him a living member of His body. The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it.”

- **Pride**—damages faith as we reject God’s truth for our own determination of what is true
- **Cowardice**—damages faith as we refuse to speak up or act on our faith for fear of what others might think
- **Laziness or Restlessness**—damages faith as we seek for “new” or “updated” ideas (especially those that avoid the cross) rather than put in the hard work to be disciples of Jesus
- **Scrupulosity or Self-righteousness**—damages faith as we focus inwardly on our own ‘perfection’ and refuse to be merciful to ourselves or others

“St Paul speaks of the ‘obedience of faith’ as our first obligation. He shows that ‘ignorance of God’ is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations. Our duty toward God is to believe in him and to bear witness to him. The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it.”

CCC #2087-2088

Eternal God,

You are a mystery as deep as the sea;

the more I search, the more I find, and the more I find the more I
search for you.

But I can never be satisfied; what I receive will ever leave me
desiring more.

Eternal Trinity, Godhead, mystery deep as the sea,
you could give me no greater gift than the gift of yourself.

Yes, you are a fire that takes away the coldness,

illuminates the mind with its light and causes me to know your truth.

Amen.



(St. Catherine of Siena)