

Our Edge Program (Middle School) recently attended the Steubenville Florida Day Rally. During the day, there was a Q&A where the youth were asking the speakers questions about our church. What follows are the questions that did not get answered at the rally but were later answered by Fr. John Gerth and emailed to the Youth Ministers. One idea for families to grow in knowledge of our faith is to pick a question each night to discuss in as a family during evening prayer.

Answers

1. Does Adam come from an ape?

In asking this question you actually have brought two issues that the Catholic Church has been dealing with in recent years. First lets talk about Adam. The creation story is found in the book of Genesis, it is in fact two creations...right? Just say "Yes Father." And nod your head like you think you know what I am talking about. The first Creation is found in Genesis 1:1- 2:4 and the second creation starts in 2:5, this is the creation that has Adam in it. Well both of these versions of Creation are there to teach us a very simple truth...everything was created by God because he loves us. Don't get yourself all caught up in trying to figure out what a "day" was to God back then or how does evolution fit into all of this because neither of these ideas have anything to do with God's love and how he created us. Remember the bible is simple and you don't have to read more into it than God already wrote.

The second issue has to do with the "ape" part. The Catholic Church has always believed and taught that human beings were always human beings and they were never anything other than human beings (and this is how you write an entire sentence using only one two-word phrase). I don't know if you had the chance to go see the new version of the "Planet of the Apes" yet (the special effects are truly killer), but even in a movie, which is sort of playing with the whole idea of evolutionism, it still points out that humans and apes, no matter how similar, are two separate species.

2. *What was the deal with Adam and Eve being naked and then being ashamed?*

Did you ever see a baby running around naked in the house? They just seem to be having the greatest time and don't even think twice about the fact that they are bouncing in their "birthday suits." Even we, as older people love the freedom and innocent these beautiful children have in the way they run around us so trustingly. Now if you or I came running out of rooms naked when company was over to visit, there would be a lot of pointing and covering of eyes and certainly a long lecture to follow...right?

Well the same thing kind of takes place in the Garden of Eden. Through their sin Adam and Eve "grew up" and realized that God could see their flaws. That's why they were ashamed of, the fact that God could see that they weren't perfect, innocent anymore.

Whenever we sin there is this huge guilt that comes with it that says, "God will never love you again because you are a sinner!" That's the great lie of sin. For God always loves, we may get a "lecture" now then for our sins, but he will always clothe us in his mercy and love.

3. *What is original sin and what does it affect? Why should I care?*

Original sins is way the scriptures have always presented the beginning of our salvation. Let me explain for those of you who started scratching your heads. Well, think about it, the first sin was in thinking that we could be equal to God (Genesis 3:5-6), right? But then God turns around and shows us how wonderful it is to be human by becoming one like us ("Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality something to be grasped at, rather he emptied himself and became human." Philippians 2:6-7). So how does Original Sin still affect us? That's easy...whenever we sin; we're thinking the same

thing the first sinners thought, “I know better than God does.” In that way we are still trying to be like God and we still need to be reminded that we don’t have to be like God, because God became one of us. And why should you care? Because a very wise person once said, “Those who don’t know history...are doomed to repeat it.” I would change that slightly to say, “Those who don’t know that they are not God are just doomed!”

4. What is the Church’s stance on dinosaurs?

They’re extinct.

Really, though, the Church has never had a statement about dinosaurs, because existence doesn’t change the fact that God created everything (I wish they would say something about Barney though).

5. If Adam and Eve only had three sons...does this mean the sons had sex with Eve to populate the planet?

Um...no.

If you read in Genesis 4; 17, Cain’s son Enoch is born of a woman in the land of Nod. Also, keep in mind nowhere in the Scriptures does it say that everyone was born of Adam and Eve. The book of Genesis is made up of a number of different stories that the ancient Hebrew people used to teach their children about how God created everything and how He related to his children (us) always out of love. The stories in Genesis were never meant to be historical documents of the early days of humanity.

These were some really good questions about Adam and Eve, keep asking and asking, just remember to keep your eyes on Christ while you’re looking.

[6. Is it wrong to read my horoscope?](#)

You know, every day I pass those pesky little horoscopes as I try to find the crossword puzzle and every day I think briefly to myself, “What would be the harm? I don’t believe in it. It’s only for fun.” And then every day the voice in my head, “Then why waste your time on something you don’t believe in?” this is quickly followed by the passage from the book of Deuteronomy 18:10 where it says, “No one shall be found among you who practices divination or soothsaying (that means fortune telling).”

Here’s my suggestion, turn right to the comics or the sports section or even the movie section before you test yourself on horoscopes. All that a horoscope is doing is trying to convince us that some person’s interpretation of an alignment of stars is more powerful than the path of God has chosen for us. Do you really want to be the person who says to God, “Oh, no Lord don’t call on me to serve today. You see my moon is in the wrong house and my governing planet is on the wane.” Instead help me out by finding the crossword puzzle and telling me what a nine-letter word for a person who doesn’t read the horoscopes, it begins with the letter “C” and ends with the letter “N”, you can fill in the blanks.

[7. What does the Church say about the Zodiac signs, and astrology?](#)

Okay, let me try to put it to you this way. You’re driving a car, heading out into the country to visit with your friend’s family. Now you aren’t quite sure where your going, but it doesn’t matter because the friend’s house your going to is in the car with you...As long as your friend is with you, are you going to need to stop and ask for directions? For those who might be thinking this...the answer is no! It’s the same for those who believe in Jesus...He is the WAY the TRUTH and the LIFE! Why in the world would you want to rely on anything or anybody to guide to his father.

So I guess the easiest way to sum the Church’s position on the matter of zodiac signs and astrology is this. Rely on God, not man or the stars. Here’s

something you can try next time someone asks what sign you are...just look at them and say, "I was born under the sign of the Cross."

8. *How do we know that God is really there? How did you get over your doubts?*

9. *Why are we Catholics if Jesus was Jewish?*

That is a very good question and the answer is actually pretty simple if you'll take just a little journey with me back to the earliest days of the Church. Okay now we're in the First Century A.D. and we notice that there is a group of young Jews in Jerusalem who are talking about the fact that the Messiah, (the Christos, in Greek) came and has been raised from the dead. Well, now we jump ahead a couple of decades and we find this group of Jews has grown and is in every major city of the Roman Empire, as well outside the Roman Empire...they are everywhere. The group has become universal, and the Greek word for universal is "Catholic". So after the Christians, those people who believe that Jesus is the Messiah break away from the rest of the Jewish faith they became known (after awhile) as the Catholic Church...and that would be us, so be loud and proud, we are still everywhere!

10. *Why are there books in my Bible that aren't in my friends Bible? Did we "add" them or make them up?*

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful book, which everyone loved and wanted to know more about. Then there came a time when some people came along and say "That part of the book doesn't go with what I am trying to teach people, so I'm taking it out." Then some others came along and did the same...in fact they took seven parts of the book out. Well, some of the people who still loved the whole book, said "Let's try to keep the rest of the book together."

Okay, so that's more the fairy tale version of the story, but it isn't far from the truth. You see in the early days of the Church, the Bible was pretty much the same that you see in the Catholic version of the Bible today. However, in the Reformation some of their leaders took books and passages out of the Bible that didn't go along with the teachings they were trying to put across. By the end of it there were seven books taken out. If you can get your hands on a copy of St. Joseph's edition of the New American Bible in the front is a copy of the "Dogmatic Constitution of Revelation" and there you will see the Church's wisdom in selecting what we have in the Bible.

11. Why aren't those other books in their Bible? Who made the decision and why?

Well, I kind of answered this already in the previous question, but I would like to add one more thought. I think we fall into the same trap as a lot of our Protestant brothers and sisters when we spend so much time trying to find the difference between our denominations. I was listening to our Catholic radio station today and our Bishop was doing a call in show where someone asked him a question very similar to this one and he said something I agree with... "Don't spend your time when you are with God's Word looking for something to separate us, rather look for things we share in our common love for Christ."

12. My friend is gay, is he going to Hell?

There is nothing sinful in simply having a particular sexual orientation, contrary to what some very judgmental group say. The church teaches that the sin isn't in the orientation, but in the act. Let me explain it like this. Now we believe that sexual intimacy outside of marriage is sinful right? Right. Well, that goes for a person whether they are heterosexual or homosexual. We ask a person to remain chaste no matter whom they are attracted to.

I mentioned the “judgmental groups” earlier; let me say something about that as well. There are a lot of people in the world who speak out against subjects, like homosexuality, with absolutely no Christian love in their hearts. Rather than listen to them, take a minute to read what the Holy Father has written about how we are to reach out in compassion and bring the love of Christ to everyone regardless of their sexual orientation. Remember the Catechism states that any person with a homosexual orientation must be “accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.” That means we are called to love them, while at the same time not say that being homosexual is the way to go. So my advice to you with your friend is this...be the truest friend you can be, show him that the truth of Jesus Christ as you live it out everyday of your life, and make him want to live it out too.

13. *Why would God make someone gay and then tell him or her they can't have sex or get married? Isn't that a little unfair?*

“In the beginning God created them male and female...” This was done for a reason...a rather important reason, namely procreation. Sex and marriage, no matter what the world would have you believe, is about creating life. Now I know that the Church teaches that procreation is not the only reason for sex and marriage (like in the case of a couple who is unable to have children), but the Church teaches that the act of sexual union, in marriage (because we're getting married first right? Right) must always be open to the possibility of beginning life. Now, unless every biology teacher I ever had lied to me, persons of the same gender cannot create life...that parts simply don't fit!

14. *Why can't/don't priests get married? Can the Pope change that?*

Priests don't get married because God loves us!

No, not really...well I mean God does love us, but the gift of celibacy is not necessarily a visible sign of this. And yet, maybe in some ways it is. The love

of God is to bring his children to Himself and to do this is such a way that our lives are filled with a sense of joy. He does this by calling each of us to a way of living his love in the world, our vocations. For some this love is brought to life in marriage, for those in lives in chastity, and for some like myself, in a life of celibacy. Now I know that over the past few decades the value of celibacy has been brought into question over and over again (and yes if the Holy Father was guided by the Holy Spirit to change priestly celibacy, he could do it), but I think most people miss the point...in a world that has forever said that sexual intimacy and physical procreation is the height of humanity there are some (Priests, Brothers and Sisters) who say that, even those other things are important, our true height as human beings is to live with our eyes focused on the true prize, God and eternal life.

So whenever you feel God is calling you remember two things:

1. If you are called to a particular vocation (and you are being called), God will give you the grace to live it out as long as you pray for your life every day.
2. We are part of a Church guided by the Holy Spirit and so we should trust in his guidance. When you get the chance, read Matthew 20:11-12. Also read paragraphs 1579 and 1580 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

15. Why can't women be priests? Can't the Pope change that?

You would think as I'm asked this question that I would have a more complex answer than the one I am about to give, but after all the arguments are over and the debates are ended, this answer seems to still be the best one I can come up with.

There will never be a time when the Holy Father is going to e-mail or call you or me and say, "My dear brother and sister, I am thinking of changing the Church's position on women and the priesthood and I was wondering ...what do you think I should do?" this is not going to happen. Popular opinion does not guide the Church, the Holy Spirit does.

My main opinion on this view is not to worry about it. It is so much more important to keep focused on what God is prompting us to do with our lives within the framework of the Church as it is now and not to get distracted by debates of what the Church should be like.

16. What are the different kinds of sin?

Well there's the slightly bad sin, the somewhat bad sin, and the totally horrible sin and the "I would not touch that with a ten-foot confessional" sin. Not!

Since the early days of the Church, sin has pretty much been divided up into two parts: moral and venial. Now there are also a number of different ways you can categorize sin, like in Paul's Letter to the Galatians (5:19-21) where he makes a distinction between sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit, or ways like the "7 Deadly Sins" and the virtues we need to fight them (this is all in St. Thomas Aquinas' book, the Summa Theologica...this thing has a lot of big words...wait for the movie). Now a mortal sin, is one that directly affects our relationship with God (like breaking one of the Commandments) and a venial sin is one that is more like just making us feel real guilty. Think of it like this, a mortal sin is like killing your next-door neighbor and a venial sin is just beating him up.

There's something I think is real important when it comes to sin and that is this... sin is breaking the relationship we have with God, of hurting the One who loves us. So you can spend your time trying to figure out, "Well, if I only do the little sins than that's okay." Or "Alright, it take 6 venial sins to add up to 1 mortal sin, so if I only commit 5 venial sins tonight, then I'm still good to go. Well first of all venial sins don't "add" up to mortal sins and secondly, stop bargaining with the love of God! We should keep eyes on our life of Grace, not out old lives of sin.

My Grandma used to say, "Life is like a dessert. You a choice between eating the Angel food cake or Devil's food cake and if you aren't eating one you are eating the another."

17. *If you have committed a mortal sin and haven't gone to confession when you die, does that mean you're going straight to Hell?*

So the one car thief said to the other car thief, "Yeah and right after Joe stole that new Cadillac he dropped dead with a heart attack. I heard he went straight to Hell. So I made a change in my life...yup, I cut down on my cholesterol."

To let me answer this one let me go straight to the Catechism because it has the best answer I can think of...mortal sin, if it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's Kingdom and the eternal death of Hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices forever, without turning back. However, although we can judge an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God." (that can be found in paragraph #1861).

18. *Why is missing Mass or taking the Lord's name in vain a mortal sin equal to murdering someone or committing adultery?*

Whoever said they were equal? Let's just look at where they are in the 10 Commandments. The first two you mentioned are in the first half of the "Big 10," that means they deal with our relationship with God, directly. Giving one day back (going to Mass) is our way of not only thanking God by worshipping him and celebrating with his children, but it also reminds us that we are not alone in our walk toward salvation. Using God's name for anything else that giving praise is a waste of our tongues. God gave us the blessing of knowing his name so that we can shout his praise not to use it as punctuation mark when we are angry or upset. Then the second two you are dealing with God, through our neighbors. So killing someone is like saying "God, my hate for this person is stronger than your love for them." Or in committing adultery, we place our own selfishness to make ourselves feel better over the true experience of love God has already given us in married life. These last two make people objects

that can either be destroyed or used like toys and human beings should be always seen as more than objects.

In this book: Crossing the Threshold of Hope (1994), the Holy Father wrote that “Man is free and therefore responsible. He is a personal and social responsibility, a responsibility which is his greatness.” (Page 180). I bring this up to show you that its all about our relationship with God either directly or indirectly through others and its not about our trying to put our sins on a curve like we do with our grades in school.

19. Is premarital sex “committing adultery?” Where in the bible does it say that sex is wrong?

Okay let me begin with the good news, sex is not wrong...if done in the union of a husband and wife in the Sacrament of Marriage. However, if this sex is happening between two people who are married, but to different people, then this is adultery (and that would be bad) or if this sexual experience is happening between two people who are not married at all, then this is what we call Fornication. And now let us open our Bibles to the following references, shall we...

My dear brothers and sisters we read in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians (6:9) “Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the Kingdom of God?” And who are the “unjust” persons? The list begins with the “fornicators.” So then we are to avoid immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body (6: 18-20).” Or again he writes in his Letter to the Romans (6:12), “Therefore, sin must not rule over our mortal bodies so that you obey their desires.” And in the Letter to the Colossians (3:5), “Put to death, the, parts of you that are earthly; immorality, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is adultery.” Even the Gospels speak about it in Matthew (15:18-19) and Mark (7:21-23).

This concludes today's brief look at the scriptural teachings on fornication and the sexual unchaste...now please open your songbooks and let us join in singing "Kumbiah."

I would encourage you to read these passages on your own and even look up the references your Bible may have to similar passages. If you want to look up the definition of fornication in the Catechism of the Catholic Church it can be found in paragraph 2353.

20. Where does the Catholic Church get it's teaching about Purgatory? What is it like? Where does the Bible talk about it?

And will I have to watch "Gilligans Island" reruns there?

You bring up one of the most wonderful Catholic questions, Purgatory. The notion does find its roots in the scriptures, passages like the Second Book of Maccabees (12:43-46) where it reads, "He (Judah Maccabees) then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiator sacrifice (to forgive the sins of the dead). In doing this he acted in a very excellent noble way, in as much as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But if he did this view to the splendid reward that awaits those who have gone to rest in Godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made an atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin." It can also be found mentioned in a number of other passages, which I'll list in the end of this.

The scripture base for the Purgatory grew in the Church until 1439 when the Bishops all got together in Florence and made the belief in purgatory official and this would be the name given to the place our souls would go after death if they needed to be cleaned up a little in "a purifying fire." This is right from the Catechism folks, paragraphs 1030-1032.

St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) wrote in his book The Dark Night, that Purgatory should be seen as the reception of God's purest love, a love that burns just a bit first, but then becomes a feeling of great peace and total acceptance (look up in Chapter 12...this is really cool stuff). Okay here are all those Bible passages I promised:

1. The Gospel of Matthew 5:20-48, this talks about both our sins and how we get to work through them.
 2. The Book of Hebrews 12:14
 3. The Letter of James 3:2
 4. The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 3:13-15
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[21. Can you be Catholic and be pro-choice?](#)

Sure you can. Lots of people claim to be Catholic, but still pick and choose the parts of Catholicism that makes them feel good. But that is not what we should be doing. If we stand and profess our faith, we need to stand by our faith as well. The issue here of being "pro-choice" (which I still think is a strange term, because the infant does not get a choice in the matter) really should not be an issue at all, because if someone takes this position they are saying that a legal right is more important than God's law. Now keep in mind that legal rights are created by people, so in agreeing that these rights are more important than God's law its just like going back to Eden and eating the fruit because the Serpent convinced you that you could know better than God. Issues of Life should not be a question of political correctness. Life is God's domain and we must defend Him at its source and end.

If this is something you are struggling with, I'll be praying for you to receive God's wisdom for this is what the Pope, in 1981 document The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World asked all of us to do...to seek wisdom enough to move beyond politics to see the real value, the human person. He wrote, "It becomes necessary, therefore, on the part of all, to recover an awareness of the privacy of moral values, which are the values of the human persons as such. The great task that has to be faced today for the renewal of

society is that of recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and it's fundamental values...to bring about the true advancement of the human person in his or her whole truth, in his or her freedom and dignity. (paragraph 8).

22. Okay, Hitler, there's a slight chance that Hitler didn't go to hell right? I mean he might have been in the wrong state of mind or something, can you explain that? Like Hitler knew it was wrong to kill, but if he suddenly somehow he became crazy seriously not in the right state of mind and killed himself could that stop him from going to hell?

You know what? If I would have first looked at this question a couple of years ago I would have thought to myself, "Oh, the fun I'm going to have with this one?" But then the tragic events of September 11th happened and all the possible humor I could have brought to this question liked this burned in the flames and smoke of the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon. All my ability to wonder what the state of mind of a killer of millions of people died on the four planes that crashed into the ground in Washington D.C., New York, and Pennsylvania. Your question should remind all of us of how lightly we used to, just weeks ago, look at the acts of war.

Hitler, Stalin, The Roman Empire during the times of Christian Persecutions, as well as modern day terrorists all have one thing in common...their pride and their greed. The pride that convinces them that they can make global decisions, as to who should live and who should die. The greed that tells them that everything around them belongs to them. We have witnessed this first hand on our own televisions as innocent men and women were sacrificed on the altar of a small group of terrorists pride and greed, in short they're evil. I assure you, I do not use this word lightly. But when you think of the horrors of Hitler's "Holocaust", Stalin's "Purgers" in Russia, of countless early Christians who died for their faith at the hands of the Romans, or of these terrorists' actions which have forever changed our country, all I can believe is that they are evil.

The good thing about all this is that evil will never win for long. On the day after the attacks, Pope John Paul II spoke at his weekly public address and said,

“The human heart has depths from which schemes of unheard of ferocity emerge, capable of destroying in a moment the normal daily life of people. But with faith comes out to aid at these times when words seem to fail. Christ’s word is the only one that can give a response to the questions that trouble our spirit. Even if the force of darkness appear to prevail, those who believe in God know that evil and death do not have the final say.”

So I thank you for your question, but now ask you to change what you might be looking for. Don’t look to see “what if” type of thing for Hitler or his actions, look rather to the presence of God that can be felt to all who are still in need of it.

23. Can you be a Catholic and not agree with everything the Church teaches?

Sure you can...feel free...disagree all you want...except for Dogmatic and Doctrine stuff. You can’t mess with them. You see the Catholics are in on letting her members make most of their own choices. Her members make most of their own choices. It’s important to remember that we as a people and we as a church give great value to “free will” because it’s such a beautiful gift from God. So when the church puts something out, it is more often than not, just giving us some guidance and explanation through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Let’s use the example of Pope St. John Paul II’s letter Familiaris Consortio (which is a big fancy way of saying, The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World...I mean there seems to be a lot more words than in the Latin, but trust me I know what it means). This letter is teaching on how families should try to show their Christianity by living lives of holiness. It also gives ways to evangelize, foster vocations to the religious, to help married couples bring Christ deeper into their marriages. But if a Catholic read this letter and said “No thanks.” That would be okay (not to bright on their part...because this is an incredible teaching from the Holy Father) since it was written so that “the Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family.” (Paragraph #1).

Okay, I mentioned Dogmas and Doctrines, those are the beliefs that define us a Church and teach us unchanging truths about God. Well let me just give you an example...on December 8, 1854, Pope Pius XI made it a Doctrine of the church that Mary was conceived without Original Sin. So in the simplest terms, God wanted it, the Holy Spirit sent it, the Holy Father said it, and we believe it! There's a great section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 88-90 on this subject and if you click on the Vatican's website they can give you a whole lot of the Dogmas and Doctrines of the Church.

Now a brief personal note. It is certain the choice of anyone to disagree with the personal teachings of the Church, but let me just say this...why? The Church, as she is being guided by the Holy Spirit is so much wiser than any one of use alone and sure, there are times when we are asked to do things that will make us unpopular or will make life a little more difficult, but so what! To live the faith means to stand in the face of the world and it calls us to push ourselves to greater levels of living the Christian message, and in the end, that's all the Church gives us...the Christian message.

24. I remember somewhere that one sin was unforgivable. What sin is that and why?

In the Gospel of Mark (3:29) it states, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin." What that means is if any one of us tries to convince ourselves that we don't need God's mercy, or won't truly repent of our sins and get back to God, or if we don't believe God can really save us then we have closed our hearts to accept any part of God. When you get the chance read paragraph 1864 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

25. What are the differences between Catholicism and a reformed religion?

With this question I am going to assume you mean how we differ from our Protestant brothers and sisters. Well there are a lot of different ways we're different from the hundreds of Protestant Churches. Let me offer just some of the more basic ways we are unique.

1. We believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
2. We hold that the Pope, as the successor of St. Peter, is chosen to lead the Church and can under certain circumstances, speak infallibly on matters of Faith and Morals.
3. We believe that God speaks to us through both Scriptures (Bible) and the Tradition (Church Teaching).

There are other things as well, but I think that these are the big ones. If you can find it, the book called, *The Catholic Source Book* has a great section on the Protestantism (including a killer chart that shows how their churches are connected back to us) on pages 254-257. Or if you want to know how we view Protestantism as a whole, check out paragraphs 817-822, 836-838 and 1400 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

26. How can I help myself become more faithful?

27. What proof does the Catholic Church have that Jesus is God?

It's a little book called...the **BIBLE!** Let's start with these:

Philippians 2:6- "Those he was God..."

John 1:1- "In the beginning there was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God."

Hebrews 1: 1-2- "In times past, God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he has made his heir of all things and through whom he first created the universe."

There are a ton of other references, take time to look them up.

28. *I have been going to Church every Sunday for the last 3 months. I have received baptism, but not first communion. I am 11 years old, what should I do?*

Just walk up to your parish priest tell him exactly what you told me and he will turn, call for the band to start playing, let the doves fly free, shoot fireworks into the air, and bring in the entire congregation to applaud your choice.

Okay, that probably won't happen (but it would be fun). Instead he will hopefully tell you all about the Catechumenate program that they have in your parish and get you hooked up with that group. The bonus is that you will also get the other Sacrament you missed out on...like Reconciliation, and Confirmation...cool, huh!

I'll be praying for you.

29. *How far is far enough in a relationship dealing with sexual activities?*

Right there...stop it right now!

Really though, think about it. If you are getting into actions and touches that feel in your heart are not of God...stop it. Relationships are each called to certain levels of chastity. For married persons, sexual intimacy is integral. For unmarried persons, sexual intimacy should not be part of the equation. Dating is the process of getting to know someone, not moving to the highest form of intimacy before the relationship has had a chance to develop. How do you know when the relationship has gotten to that level...you're married!

I would recommend taking a moment and talking with your priest, youth minister, maybe even your parents. And most importantly make sure that all your relationships (especially girlfriend and boyfriend) are holy. Talk about

your faith and you can even pray together. The more God is a part of your relationship, the less lust will.

30. *I was reading through the Catechism of the Catholic Church and came across paragraph 2301. What exactly does that mean? Can I be cremated?*

Sure you can be cremated...but you might want to wait until you're dead.

For those who might not be familiar with the paragraph you mentioned...this quote is for you:

“The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body.”

What that means is that those persons who choose to be cremated still have to be respectful of the body that God had gifted them with in this life. So, cancel the airplane ride to scatter your ashes over the Rockies, and put the boat trip to the middle of your favorite lake to toss your ashes out there on hold. Cremains (the ashes of a cremate person) must be placed in a permanent, sacred place...namely, you still have to be buried or placed in a cemetery niche (not the niche in your mother's den...that's a no, no too).

31. *Did Jesus ever sin?*

This one is easy...the answer is NO!

God doesn't sin, Jesus is the second person of God; therefore Jesus doesn't sin.

32. *I've heard twice just in the last month that being a Catholic and being a Christian are not the same thing, say what?*

That means twice in the last month you've met people who have no clue what they are saying. The Christian Church in the first centuries after Christ was still all one which lead St. Ignatius of Antioch (in his Letter to the Smyrnians) to say that Christians were "Catholicos," that means "Universal." The words "Catholic" and "Christian" meant the same thing until the time of the Protestant Reformation when the Reformers could not use the word "Catholic" (since their beliefs were not universal) they clung to word "Christian." Many people to this day don't know they are the first Christians...be proud of that my friend.

[33. *Have you ever been in the face in the face of evil? If so, what did you do?*](#)

[34. *Where did people go after they died before Jesus came?*](#)

To stand in a line at the Driver's License Bureau.

Not really. I direct you attention to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 633:

“Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which Christ went down, “hell”-Sheol in the Hebrew or Hades in Greek because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God. Such is the case for all the dead, whether evil, or righteous, while they await the redeemer: which does not mean that their lot is identical, as Jesus shows through the parable of the poor man Lazarus who was received into ‘Abraham’s bosom.’” It is precisely these holy souls, who awaited their Savior in Abraham’s bosom, whom Christ delivered when he descended into hell. Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him.”

I would invite you to read the rest of this section, paragraph 631-635.

35. *Why does the priest wear the collar, what's the point?*

The whole thing is part of God's plan for me never to have to learn how to tie a tie...I just can't do it, but a little slip of white plastic fit into a hole in my collar, that I can do...thus my self-esteem saved and I feel confident enough to answer to your questions.

And now on to the real answer.

The Roman Collar actually developed over time and has been given a number of different meanings through the centuries. At the Second Council of Nicea (787 A.D.), it was called a symbolism of poverty. Then during the Council of Trent (1545 A.D.) they added the character of dignity and finally in 1931, the Sacred Congregation added the idea of protection. I also heard once that it should remind us, as priests, that we are God's slaves. Remember slaves were chained around the neck with collars. I don't know where that once comes from, but I personally like the idea that I must always represent my Master and not let myself get in the way.

36. *Why can't we see God?*

37. *I'm confused. God created us with a free will yet I thought that we also believe in predestination (God know everything about us and our life before it happens). What's the deal?*

The idea of predestination that the Church has always held is not exactly the same thing as you stated. What the Church has is basically that God knows everything, all the possibilities there are, but in His love allows each person, through the gift of their Free Will, to choose which possibilities there are, but in His love allows each person, through the gift of their Free Will, to choose which possibility will become reality. So even though God knows everything, we still have to make all the choices for our lives. And that's the deal!

If you want to read more about his subject check it out in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 600, 1007, 2012, 2782, and 2823.

38. *What can I do when my close friend is thinking of converting from the Catholic faith, and I don't agree with her decision?*

First of all, keep praying for her. Then sure you remind her of all the truths of the Catholic faith. The Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, that she would be giving up by going to another church that doesn't have an authentic Priesthood. Show her the joy you get from being Catholic that may be the best example for her. Make sure you let her know how much the Church means to you and take any opportunity to tell her how great it is to be a Catholic. I'll be praying for you both.

39. *If Jesus told the rich man to give up all his belongings to follow him, why does the Pope have all those nice clothes and gold stuff?*

What "nice clothes and gold stuff" does the Pope own? He is only seen in public in a simple white garment. The finery, like the vestments he wears and the works of art in the Vatican are not his property. Besides, the passage you are referring to (Matthew 19:16-22) has more to do with the idea that things, possessions should never dominate your life...your focus must be first on your faith. In this I feel pretty confident in saying in Pope John II you will find few people, perhaps in the history of the Church, that have been better examples of not letting themselves or their possessions become a distraction from what God has called them to do.

40. *If someone doesn't believe in the Pope, can they still be Catholic?*

Let me phrase it this way. If you are on a sports team (pick your favorite...I'm thinking of football myself, why, because it is the perfect game...right!) can you be on that team and listen to what the coach says, sure you can, but you're not going to be very happy and your team probably won't be winning many of their games. The coach is there to help guide the team, to share whatever wisdom they have and offer the team the best chance of success. If someone is on the team and doesn't have confidence in the coach the team is in trouble. Now think of it that way...our team is the Catholic Church, the President of our franchise is Jesus himself and he has chosen the Pope (through St. Peter and all the Pope after him) to lead us and guide toward our ultimate victory...salvation. So I guess its more of a question of whether or not you want to be on the winning team...if you do, we've get a great coach in Pope John Paul II, just listen to what he says and writes and you'll be fine.

41. I went to Adoration for the first time the other night, what should I do?

That is so cool! I love my times when I can be in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. As far as what you should do, in some churches there are guide books for Adoration (you should ask your church to see if they've got some), in other churches you might find a list of things to do on a plaque on the wall as you go into the Adoration room or chapel, some places don't really give any directions. No matter what your situation is, try this...pray! I know that sounds like a short answer, but you shouldn't have to worry so much about doing it "right", just enjoy your time with the Lord and pray. I'm proud of you for taking this step in letting God be more in your life...keep it up!

42. I haven't been to Confession in a long time and I'm scared to go back, cause I'm gonna do it wrong. What do I do?

First...don't wait anymore, just get a priest and tell him that you haven't been to Confession for a long time and you have to go now (it helps if you get that face that little children get when they're trying to convince their parents to take

them to the bathroom)! Don't worry you can't "do it wrong." Sure there's a formula: **Bless me father, for I have sinned. It has been a really long time since my last Confession and these are my sins.** And you can do that if you want, but most of the priests I know will not hold it against you if you can't remember those exact words. The most important thing is that you tell God your sins and receive his forgiveness. "What do I do?" Be sorry for your sins, confess them to God, receive forgiveness and go live His love.

I'll be praying for you and you'll do great.

43. I am totally for following chastity, but is kissing as big a sin as premarital sex? Just wondering...

Wonder no more...kissing is not a sin (let the pigeons loose and the skies be filled with fireworks, Fr. J just said kissing is okay!). Just be aware of yourself enough to know when kissing is leading to other things (and you know what I am talking about).

44. If someone goes to confession and tells the priest that they were engaged in sexual activity but they don't tell the priest exactly what happened they kinda summarize it; is that considered lying to the priest? Example: The person who went to reconciliation said that they only messed around by touching. Is that considered sex and lying to a priest and is she still considered a virgin?

Wow!! There are so many issues here I am not quite sure where to begin.

Let's start with the Confession question first. It seems to me that the person your mentioning doesn't have a full grasp of what happens in the Sacrament or else they wouldn't even be bringing me this question about lying to the priest. The Sacrament is there for people, who truly want to change their lives and get right with God again, to dump their sins in God's lap and hear that they are

forgiven. So that they don't have to carry the guilt of their sins around with them all the time. If someone feels compelled to lie to the priest it tells me two things: 1) They really don't feel sorry enough for their sins. Because if they did, no amount of possible embarrassment or even a possible lecture from the priest would be able to keep them from wanting to tell God they're sorry. 2) They don't realize that it's not the priest they would be lying to. Nope they would be lying to themselves and God (which, by the way, is another sin).

There should be no fear involved in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (I know there are often is, but get over it...there's nothing to be scared of). Christ gave us this Sacrament for us to lose our guilt, heal the memories of our sins, and come back to a state of Grace in His Father's love. Let your trust in God, be greater than your fear.

Now the issue of how this person is abusing their sexuality as well as another human being. I say that very bluntly on purpose. If anyone is doing the things you describe, they are being nothing less than abusive. They're playing the game of "How close to edge of the cliff of virginity can I get before I fall of?" Let me answer the main point of this game...BOOM...SPLAT!!! Yeah, if you play the game, you've already fallen. The gift of human sexuality should never be brought down to the level of whether or not the other person has clothes on, or if there is actually penetration. It's meant to be the fullest expression of the intimacy of two people, within the context of marriage, of their life long love for each other and their desire to celebrate that love (and possibly bring new life into this world because of their love). Its not so somebody can get excited or because "we're curious" or "I love them and we're going to get married someday." If that's the case, then wait!

Having said all of this (and you may notice I got a little worked up over this one), I don't want anyone who has been in a situation like this to go away thinking "Man, I'm going to Hell! And Fr. J hates me! No one will ever love me again!" Because that's not true. If anyone has gotten themselves into a place or time when they have made mistakes in the area of their sexuality, just get right with God (go do a good and honest Confession) and don't let anyone pull you away from Him again. Winston Churchill once said that they only

thing we truly own in life are our mistakes. It's true we do own them, but not so that we can either repeat them over and over again, or use them to beat ourselves up with, but so that we can look at how far we have come in moving closer to the people God calls each of us to be.

45. *Why does the Church pay so much attention to Mary?*

Because she's just so incredibly cool! I mean that. I know I could go deep into Mariology (the study of Mary) on this one, but let's just cut through everything and get to the point. Mary is everything we should want to be. Someone totally open to the will of God. Someone who not only gave birth to Jesus, but also spent her entire life loving Him. Someone who could stand up for herself (don't believe me, look at the way she bosses Jesus around at the wedding of Cana, John:2 3-5). Like I said, everything we should want to be...being totally open to God, bringing Christ into the world through our actions and deeds, loving Him so much that we never want to do anything to hurt Him and standing up for ourselves at all times. That's what Mary means and that's incredibly cool!

If you want to read more of the Church's stance on Mary, here's a couple places to check out. First, read anything that Pope John Paul II has written, he always talks about Mary at some point. Second look in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, especially paragraphs 148, 494, 722, 963 and 967-972.

46. *I was told that Catholics worship statues, is that true?*

No.

Okay, you're probably looking for more on this one. We use statue as focal points for prayer. Human beings need to use their senses to be themselves most fully. Statues, icons, paintings call all be used to heighten the intensity of being a person of prayer. In fact, back in 1999, Pope John Paul II wrote a beautiful

letter to the Artists of the world reminding all of us that art “gives voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption.” If you want to read the whole thing click on the Catholic News Service (or CNS) and go to April 4th 1999 (I think that was East that year).

[*47. Reconciliation, can you explain why we believe this and do this, a lot of my protestant friends think that we don't have to go through a Priest for God to forgive us and wonder why we do...can u explain?*](#)

Let's talk about Reconciliation for a moment. We confess our sins to a priest for a couple of reasons:

1. Christ commanded it when He said, “What ever sins you forgive are forgiven, what ever sins you hold bound, are held bound.” (John 20:23). This was told to the Apostles, our present day Bishops are the inheritors of their authority, priests get their ability to perform the Sacraments from their Bishop, therefore we must forgive sin.
2. There is no such thing as a private sin. Whether we have committed the by ourselves or with other people, a sin always has its effects throughout the entire community of the faith. Let me explain it on two levels; if one of us sins it changes the way we interact with other people...maybe because of the shame or guilt of the sin or maybe because of the fear of being found, but no matter what we change how we act; part two comes from St. Paul's analogy of the Body of Christ (check Romans 12: 3-8) where he states that all believers in Christ are united, that means if one of us sins we demand the Body that all of us belong therefore reconciliation must be done through a representative of the Body, and for us as Catholics this is a priest.

The whole “I can't just have a personal relationship with God and He will forgive my sins.” I just don't think it works very well. There's just too many “saved” people walking around feeling guilty all the time. I also think that there are a lot of people who don't really want to go through the process of

being humbled before God and letting Him know that we are so sorry for the sins we have committed that we are willing to do anything to get right Him again...including telling another person the sins we have committed (look at James 5:16).

I was reading this really good book on Reconciliation not too long ago, called Reconciliation Embrace, which has a number of authors, but in the second to the last chapter, written by H. Kathleen Hughes, RSCJ, she writes a very beautiful interpretation of how we should be looking at the Sacrament. She compares it to two “abysses” (which she actually gets Pope Paul VI who used the analogy back in 1974), one of sin and the other of God’s love. Here’s what she wrote, “Today, if we are must choose between the two great abysses, and perhaps counteract the recent past, I think we must lose ourselves for a time in the other abyss, that of God’s tenderness, mercy, compassion and love. People who are overwhelmed by God’s love become preoccupied with sustaining that relationship and making God’s tender mercy and compassion available to all. That, I believe, is the heart of reconciliation.”

48. Why can't women be priests?

You think as I am asked this question that I would have a much more complex answer than the one I am about to give, but after all the arguments are over and the debates are ended, this answer seems to still be the best I can come up with. That there will never be a time when the Holy Father is going to e-mail or call you or me and say, “My dear brother or sister, I am thinking of changing the Church’s position on women and the priesthood and I was wondering...what do you think I should do?” this is not going to happen. Popular opinion does not guide the Church, the Holy Spirit does.

My main option on this view is not to worry about it. Its so much more important to keep focused on what God is prompting us to do with out lives within the framework of the Church as it is now and not get distracted by debates of what the Church should be like.

49. *I have been asked this by several of my friends and don't really know how to answer it- why is it a sin for non-Catholics to receive the Eucharist at a Catholic Mass?*

Well, rather than look at it as a sin, let's try it from another angle...how about being faithful to what you believe in. What I mean by that is we, as Catholics, believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit the bread and the wine offered at Mass become, in truth and reality, the Body and the Blood of Jesus...am I right? Of course I am (its good to be the priest)! So, that being true, then if one of your non-Catholic friend who might be coming from a religious tradition that believes the times when they have bread and wine (or grape juice in some cases) at their services is simply a symbol of Christ being with them could not be true to what they believe and still receive the Eucharist in the Catholic Mass. Looking at it this way, the non-Catholic who doesn't receive the Eucharist at the Catholic Mass is just being loyal to their own beliefs...and if your friend says, "Well, I do believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist." Then get them into the RCIA program, because almost Catholic already!

50. *Fr. John, how do I know if God wants to make me a nun? I think he does, but then I don't know...how can I be sure?*

Well, first you do the following things:

1. Get a bucket of cold water.
2. Stand in it.
3. Raise your left hand in the air.
4. Stop that...you're gonna look silly!

You know what, though, part of trying to figure out how God is calling you to serve His people may seem just that silly sometimes. I mean we're asked to stay open to His word, to His prompting us in prayer and to most people who live in the world, where results you can see are so important that its just plain

silly. But God is not interviewing you for a job...He's not looking to see if you're qualified for the position...He knows you're qualified, because He made you that way. If God has given you the gifts and the vocation to be a Religious Sister, you'll be able to do it. Those moments when you feel like your not sure, that's just normal fear of the unknown type stuff. Don't let it get to you. Just be like Peter and keep your eyes on Jesus and He won't let you sink.

There's a couple of practical and spiritual things I would suggest (and these are for real):

1. Pray for an open heart to be led where God is calling you.
2. Talk to some nuns you may know if your Diocese has a Vocations Office see if they can get you in touch with any of the women Religious Orders that might be in your area.
3. Talk to your Youth Minister.
4. Go on a weekend retreat for Vocational discernment, if something like that is available where you live.
5. Don't stop praying.

I'll be praying for you as go along this journey. I know for myself that figuring out if God was truly wanting to serve His people as a Priest was one of the craziest and holiest times in my life. Don't be afraid, just trust in God.

[51. What is the best part and worst part of being a priest?](#)

Oh, this is a very cool question, but at the same time its also kind of hard to answer. Its like the other day, someone asked me what my song was and I had to think along time about it, because I've got a favorite song for different moods or events. Like, if I'm working at never ending attempt to keep my garage clean, I play something with a driving beat (right now my favorite song for this is P.O.D's "Youth of the Nation"). But if I'm waiting to get serious. I play Third Day's "King of Glory." So you can see that if I have a hard time just nailing down the songs I like you can imagine how hard it is for me to choose the best and worst parts of my life, but for you I'm willing to give it a try.

The worst part is...well actually there are two parts, one personal and one priestly. The personal worst of being a priest is having to celebrate Mass real early in the morning, like at 6:30 a.m. I am not a morning person and if I had my choice 6:30 am. Mass would begin at 10:00am. The priestly worst part I whenever I hear someone who will not allow God to change their lives, just not let Him in. This truly hurts me, to watch someone say “Amen” as they receive the Eucharist and see them yelling at people as they leave the parking lot. Or to see someone so filled with hate from some event their past, that they just will not allow themselves to believe God loves them. Or to hear of people who are so miserable in life, but don’t want to take the risk of letting God in and so they end miserable throughout their lives. Or people who can only see the differences in others and make fun of them for it. These are the worst parts of the priesthood for me.

52. *Is it wrong date a black guy if you are white?*

There is nothing morally wrong about dating someone from another race. The days of judging someone solely on the basis of his or her skin color are quickly moving into the past (at least I think that they are). Many years ago my own baby sister (if she reads that “baby” part I’m in tons of trouble, lol) went out with an African American and in all honesty he was one of the nicest guys she ever dated. If you feel the prejudices of other people, (ie, parents, brothers, or sisters, friends, Romans, Countrymen...no, no, not the last 2...I was having a Shakespearean moment there, lol) then I would say that you need to sit down and talk to them about it.

53. *My parents got divorced, then they received an Annulment. What does that mean for me?*

If what you are trying to get at is “am I still legitimate,” then the answer is YES! It is a common misunderstanding that the Annulment process says that a

marriage never happened, but that's simply not the case. Marriage is both a legal contract, and a covenant. When your parents got married they signed a marriage license (that contract ended when your parents got civilly divorced). They also made promises to God (this is the issues that Annulments deal with). In the end, what the Annulment of your parents means for you is that nothing has changed of any real significance in your relationship with them...you still love them and they still love you. If you still have any questions about what Annulments are, I would recommend the following book...*100 Answers to Your Questions on Annulments by Edward J. Peters.*

54. *I went to a Protestant service once and the people there were so into church. They were yelling out "Alleluia" and "Praise God" and such...jumping up and down...I felt like I was at a concert...How come Catholics don't jump up and down for the Lord during Mass?*

Because as fun as that may sound...emotions are not the only thing that need be touched when we gather to worship our Lord. I know that there are number of Protestant denominations (Pentecostals come to mind first) that put a great deal of emphasis on the expression of worship in very excited ways (the jumping up and down and shouting kind of stuff you were talking about), but the example that Christ gave was that of a teacher not a Rock Star. When he gathered the people around him, he taught them about His Father, he didn't start a dance party. When he gather to celebrate the Eucharist, there should be elements of joy...the music should get our toes tapping and out hands raised in prayer or even clapping, but if for some reason it doesn't we shouldn't feel like we got ripped off. No matter what else happens, we still have the living Word of God proclaimed to us and we still to receive Jesus into our bodies through the Eucharist (something the ones the jumping up and down don't get to share in) and that should get our hearts jumping inside us and pushing us to proclaim not just "Alleluia" and "Praise God," but that we speak the entire Gospel with our lives every day.

55. *If the Catholic Church believes the animals don't have souls, then how can we believe in the theory of evolution? If we evolved from apes, does that mean our souls evolved from apes?*

In the response to this question may I just say...whoa, where did that come from?

Two things I want to make real clear for you:

1. The Darwinian theory of evolution (which is the one I think you are talking about) is not held as a belief by the Catholic Church. We do believe in evolution, but that means we believe that species change and over time, not that one species will become another and certainly not that human beings came from apes. "God created man in his own images, in the divine images he created him; male and female he created them." (Gen 1:27)
2. Read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 279-301 to get the Catholic Church's real teaching on creation "*and stop watching Planet of the Apes*"

56. *If someone looks at pornography and masturbates regularly even though he or she knows it is wrong is wrong, is he or she going hell?*

The hell part is not up to me, it is up to God, but I am almost certain that you are going to blind. However, in reality we are dealing with two different issues. The first is the whole pornography thing. I know that it is everywhere today: books, magazines, movies, the Internet, and especially television, but it doesn't change the fact that is wrong. St. Paul tells us in the first letter to the Corinthians Chapter 6 verse 15. "Do you not see that your bodies are members of Christ? Would you have me take Christ's member and make them members of a prostitute? God forbid!" This means that even though there are people who are willing (and we should pray for them because it's sad) to make their living by degrading themselves and making themselves objects of lust, it certainly doesn't mean should help pay salaries by buying those magazines,

books, or visiting those web sites. I would also recommend that you open up your *Catechism* and read paragraph 2354.

57. *Why can't a Catholic be married outside the church?*

Because the majority of priests are Irish, and we have very fair skin and burn very easily!

And now for the real answer.

That is that you can be married outside as long as the priest who is doing the ceremony gets permission from his Bishop. Let me quote from the *Code of Canon Law* (this is the book that has all the laws that govern the Catholic Church) “The local ordinary (the Bishop) can permit marriage to be celebrated in some other suitable place (other than a though of the Church, and the reason you need to get special permission is because marriage is a covenant with God. Therefore, we should be in His house when we promise to allow when people are dreaming (and planning) their wedding, everything is about how it looks, but it shouldn't be the biggest part. The most important part of a wedding is the simplicity of two people standing before their family and friends, in the presence of God, saying, “I do.”

58. *My best friend has been going to Church with me. She has never had first communion or anything. But is it still okay for her to get confirmed?*

Well the short answer is no, but let me say a little bit more about this (by this time, everybody who reads this section knows I am never at a loss for words). What I really mean is not yet. The sacraments are received in an order. The first Sacrament, which has to be received, the one that we enter into Church through, is Baptism. You can't receive ANY other sacrament without first receiving Baptism. The other sacrament such a communion, reconciliation, and confirmation mark the continued maturity of spirit that a person has their

journey of faith. So to skip over any one of those is like going from arithmetic to quantum physics without every doing any math in between you would get lost! My suggestion to your friend is to see if there is an RCIA program in your parish and if so, get into it! In case your wondering what RCIA is, it is a program by which people who are coming from other denominations, or persons who have not received all their sacraments, go through in order to receive all there sacraments. I'll be praying for you.

59. *Hi, Fr. John. How is fact different from a truth? Why is it that a fact may not always be a truth?*

And now let us open our books and begin philosophy 101. The philosopher Plato said that a fact deals with “sensible things.” That means things that we can sense (taste, touch, hear, smell, see) or that can be qualitatively understood like through Science (this is basically Jodi Foster’s entire character in the movie *Contact*). A truth on the other hand, deals with things that go beyond our senses. They can only be comprehended by a certain leap of faith (like in the classic *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* where Indy must make a leap of faith to save his father’s life). “We do not fix our gaze on what is seen but what is unseen. What is seen is transitory; what is unseen lasts forever.” (2 Cor. 4:18) That is not to say that there are not truths found in facts, there are. But, that truth is always deeper than fact (such as the vast deepness of *The Abyss*).

60. *My mother and I are Catholic and my dad is Greek Orthodox, he has always told me that St. Andrew went to preach the Gospel in Greece and founded the Greek Orthodox Church. Is that true?*

St. Andrew did indeed go to Greece. In particular he went to the city of Byzantium, which is now known as Constantinople. According to *Butler’s Lives of Saints*, “Theodoret tells us that St. Andrew passed into Greece” and mentions that some traditions even have him as the first Bishop of Byzantium (even though historically, the first Bishop is St. Metrophanes). It’s not quite the

whole truth to say that St. Andrew founded the Greek Orthodox Church was still one and the split that created the two Churches (Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic) had yet to occur. Today though the Greeks do claim that St. Andrew is the first leader of their Church, just like we claim the Peter as our first Pope. Remember something though, more than any other Christian Church, the Greek Orthodox and we are the closest to one another.

61. I feel guilty. Yesterday I had sex with my boyfriend. Will I go to hell b/c I'm not married?

Thanks for your honesty in this matter and it is a truly serious matter indeed. You made a decision that will change everything in your life. I don't mean to sound too melodramatic, but you now stand at a crossroads. You mentioned a fear of going to hell, well, I'd like to think that our all-loving God would not judge damnation because of one sinful act, still the crossroads have been reached. *The Book of Deuteronomy* says, "I'll have set before you life and death, the blessing and a curse. Choose life, then, that you may live." (30:19). Don't let this sin become a part of your everyday life. If you truly want to be a person of God, and if you want your relationship with your boyfriend to be something holy, don't let sinful acts, such as having sex before marriage, keep you from the life Christ wants you to live in Him.

It is serious what you have done, but don't live in guilt...go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and heal this wound on your soul. Then find the time to talk to someone you trust, a priest, a nun or a youth minister and let them help you find a way to keep yourself from falling back into this kind of pattern in your relationship. I'll be praying for you, and remember...choose life!

62. Did Mary ever sin?

Remember what the angel said when he greeted Mary in the *Gospel of Luke*, "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter!"(1:28) This passage is also translated as

saying, “Rejoice, you who are full of grace!” This means that God prepared Mary to be clean (sinless) so that she could give birth to the Son of God. As the Church has always taught this means that Mary was conceived without Original Sin (the Immaculate Conception) and so she was free from sin. This does not mean that she was never tempted, but the Church says that she was filled with the love of the Holy Spirit that there was no room for sin to take over. And that’s a lot of love!

If you want to read more about this belief, check out the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraphs 721-726.

63. What is reincarnation and is it real?

Reincarnation is a belief held by many religions, especially Eastern Religions, that teaches a person gets more than more shot a life on this earth. For example, in Hinduism, the actions that you do in this life will dictate the kind of life you’ll get next. Like if you’re just this horrible person, always treating others badly and generally being a jerk, then you may come back as a cockroach or writer for *Dawson’s Creek* or something. There are a lot of people who claim to be reincarnated and yet ironically enough they were all real important people, King Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, Marie Antoinette and so forth...its weird that nobody ever claims to be somebody like the stamp licker for the Continental Congress.

We believe that this life is the only we get on this earth, because the time we spend here is a beginning for the eternal life we have with God. Remember, what the Book of Ecclesiastes, says “There is a time to be born, and a time to die.” (3:2) And in the Catechism of the Catholic Church we read, “Death is the end of man’s earthly pilgrimage, of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine plan, and to decline his ultimate destiny. When ‘the single course of our earthly life’ is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: ‘It is appointed for men to die once.’ There is no ‘reincarnation’ after death.” (paragraph 1013).

64. *Why don't we celebrate Hanukkah if Jesus celebrated Hanukkah?*

Hanukkah, which actually is considered a minor Jewish Holiday (unlike Passover, which a much more important one for them), officially began during the Maccabean revolts against the Greeks conquerors approximately 150 years before the birth of Christ. According the *First Book of Maccabees* 4:52-59, a group of faithful Jews entered the temple after it had been profaned by the Greeks and spent eight days praises God in song and music as a sign of rebellion against their oppressors and their love for God. This was to be kept as a time of joy (no crying allowed...) for eight days every year in the month of Kislew.

I asked a friend of mine, who happens to be a Rabbi, if there was a chance that Jesus would have ever celebrated Hanukkah. He said that it was not very likely, because most of the evidence they have from that period of history shows that there was little or no reference even made to the holiday. In fact, the *Mishnah* (one of the most important Jewish religious books) doesn't mention it all. My mine told me that this was probably because the *Mishnah* was compiled during the time of the Roman occupation of the Holy Land and would have seen any reference to a holiday dedicated to Jewish freedom as punishable offense. So he doesn't think they even celebrated the eight holiday at all. Seeing how it is only a minor holiday anyway.

Now as to why we don't celebrate Hanukkah...because for us as Christians, the birth of our Savior is kind of important to us. The Incarnation of God kind of is a big step up from spending eight days remembering to be happy. Now I'm not knocking our Jewish brothers and sisters, as with every other Holy we have (Easter come to mind as well) the Church asks us to focus on the event of our salvation, not in keeping the Jewish traditions. Remember we believe that the Messiah has already come so we don't need a special season to tell us to be happy...the source of all Joy is with us everyday. MERRY CHRISTMAS!

65. I am totally about saving myself until marriage, but is the Roman Catholic Church the only religion that enforces it or are there other religions that actually say that premarital sex is wrong?

That is a great question...mainly because it always seems to be the Catholic Church who is saying someone publicly about issues on sexual abstinence. Yet, the reality is that most of mainline Christian Church (like Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists...just to name a few) share the same views on chastity, because all of these teachings on chastity, because all of these teachings on chastity as well, such as the Jews and Muslim (in fact, some of their laws are much stricter than our on the subject) and the Mormons as well have a very strong view on waiting for marriage to engage in sexual union.

I really am glad you asked the question because it does seem that sometime the Catholics are the only ones saying anything about this subject, but we are not alone. Stay God's and always let your love be pure.

66. Eleven kids from church also attend my high school. We are thinking of starting a daily prayer meeting. We're not sure what we should be doing. Any words of wisdom?

Man, that is so cool! From what I have seen at schools where prayer groups of Bible studies have been formed there is always a growth in the presence of the Holy Spirit that flows all over the school campus. If you and your friends truly feel called to do this...go for it!

There are a couple of steps I would do first though. You need to get it cleared with someone in your school's administration, like the principle or somebody and find out what guidelines they would like you to follow. This is kind of important because most public schools are nervous about the whole "separation of Church and State" stuff, but I have found that if they know you will follow there rules they tend to let this kind of prayer stuff fly a bit easier. I think you also need to leave it open to anybody who want to join you, but don't loose

your identity as a Catholic at prayer. If you ever attended a prayer service held by another religion you can always tell that they are praying the way their tradition has taught them...ya'll (pardon my Southern speak) need to let everybody know that you're Catholic and proud of it. Also, if you can, get a teacher and maybe your youth minister to kind of sponsor your prayer...it looks good to adults if other adults are involved.

I'll be praying for you.

67. I have somewhat of a personal question to ask you:

My Grandfather is battling cancer of his liver; he only has a few months to live. My family is Catholic, and I am raised as one. My Grandparents are converted Jehovah Witnesses from a non-Catholic religion. My question is, is my Grandfather praying to God or Jehovah, and, is he going to Heaven to live with God or Jehovah?

That is a very good question and I truly feel your love and concern coming through for your Grandfather. I know that there are a great number of emotions and questions that we have to deal with when someone in our family, someone we love, is facing death. We tend to worry about everything, but let put your mind at ease on this issue. When your Grandfather prays his prayers are heard by the one and only God there is. The Jehovah Witnesses use a much older word that comes from the Old Testament, but the word "Jehovah" is just another name for God. As far as Heaven goes there is only one of those as well. Don't worry too much about your Grandfather's soul...there is a loving God and Father watching out for him.

I'll be praying for you and your family.

68. My friend is 15 and he says he does not believe in God, how can I try to help him believe again?

This is not an uncommon thing to have happen among people especially teenagers. Like with so many other things they look at the actions of people and judge whether or not something is worth putting their time into. They do it with everything and most of all with their faith. The most common word I hear from teenagers who are trying to convince they don't want to believe in God or religion is "hypocrite." They look for the inconsistencies and when they find someone who isn't living up to the ideal, then the whole must be a lie. Unfortunately there are a lot of examples in the world of people who claim to be believers and don't let their actions go along with that belief. And the media doesn't help with its mixed message that range from everything is okay as long as you believe in something to don't believe in anything because its just "opium for people" (to quote Marx and Hegel on that matter). My suggestion to you is this...first, be the best witness of your faith that you can for your son...remember what St. Francis said, "where there is doubt, let me bring faith." As a parent, you (whether you know it or not) are always going to be your son's first and finest teacher of the faith. Second, if there is a youth minister or a Priest that your son has trusted in the past and would be willing to go speak with about his doubts...get together. Third, pray and pray and pray...remember St. Monica prayed for son St. Augustine for thirty years and when he finally came to the Lord he did some incredible stuff. Fourth, don't get discouraged, if he doesn't come around over night, don't worry...just keep being there for him and remind that God is always waiting for him as well.

69. If Mormons believe they can become "gods" is this not against the First Commandments? Also this sounds a lot like Anton LaYey's Satanic teachings about making your own god(s) out of yourself.

Wow, okay now that's not really a leap I think we should be taking. It is very true that from the understanding of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church that we have the Mormon theology of the afterlife, and in particular their belief that they can become divine like God, is not right and could even be interpreted as breaking the First Commandment. Still, I would never go to the point of equating the beliefs of Mormons with the thoroughly selfish and down right evil writings of Anton La Vey and his "Church of Satan." The people

who follow La Vey's teachings do not want to just become "gods" of their own lives, but they want to bring about destruction of everything holy and righteous (if you want to hear a description of their intentions find a copy of The Satan Seller by Mike Warnke). They live in the ultimate lie, *You certainly will not die. No. God knows well that the moment you eat of the fruit your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know everything.*" (Gen. 3:4-5)

As much as we may have the theological differences with the Mormons they are not to be seen in the same light as any Satanist. The Mormons, I believe, have a genuine (as misguided as it may appear) desire for salvation. Satanists have only a desire to fulfill their own selfish wants and to hate everything that Jesus Christ and the salvation He brought to the world means.

I hope that this helps clear things up for you.

70. Dear Fr. John, my best friend has lost his faith and it wasn't too long ago that he was such a strong believer. He has recently gone through a difficult time due to depression, but he is so much happier and better now that its difficult to believe he was ever sad. So I'm not sure what exactly happened. If anything I would have thought his faith would have been stronger. He says he just realized one day that none of it made any sense. Is there anything I can do to help him accept God again?

I would say that you **are** already doing something for him. The care and concern I read in this question could only come from someone who is already seeking answers and praying hard. Keep doing that!

Another thing you can do is to continue to be a living example of the reality and the power of God's love. Sometimes when people have had to go through very difficult situations (like your friends depression) they feel that they have to face everything alone... show him that's not the case.

Remind him often, through your actions that God's love is always there. Sometimes people, maybe your friend, fall into the trap of thinking "If I start

caring again or seeing that the world is truly a beautiful place, then I'll get sick again and it will all be taken away. So as long as I say 'I don't care' or 'I can't get hurt.' Enter into his life with your own strength of faith and let him know that some things do matter...like people, like life, like caring for each other and that all of these are gifts from God. Remember what it says in the First Letter of John "God is love and those who love are of God." (4:7). Finally, never stop praying for him.

71. Is it wrong to switch from Baptist to Catholic?

No, personally I would find it a great reason to celebrate! It shows a growth in a person's journey of faith. To realize the fullness of Christ's presence in Word and Sacrament and to embrace the Church Christ founded through the Holy Spirit and upon the Rock of Peter and the Apostles I think that's one of the coolest things a person could ever do! Man, I think everybody should be Catholic!

I'll be praying for you.

72. In the Sacrament of Confession if there is a severe crime that say a Youth Minister commits against a teen...what does the priest do? I realize that he is unable to say anything; that would obviously be breaking the vows that he took when he became a priest. But say that this person was repeating to molest a teen over a period of time, can the priest do anything to prevent further contact if this is revealed in the Sacrament of Confession? Or is he supposed to stand by oblivious to what is happening and possibly put others at risk?

Alright...this is an easy one to answer...**NOT!**

You bring up one of the most challenging situations a priest can come across in the Sacrament of Reconciliation...the sanctity of the Confessional vs. the safety

of others. I remember going through scenarios in the Seminary where people would bring up all sorts of tricky things that could come up in the Confessional and thinking to myself, “This could never really happen.” And yet, it does really happen. You are right about the priest not being permitted to break the seal of Confession, in fact this is what the Code of Canon Law (that’s the book that tells us priests what we can and can’t do) says, “*The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason.*” (Canon 983) It is ultimately the role of the priest in Reconciliation to help the person return to a place of being in a holy, a just, and a loving relationship with God and with all people. The person coming to the Sacrament needs to remember this, its not a place to hide things and then going back and sin again thinking “No one can catch me now.” It is instead a place where they can leave their sinful lives behind them and begin a new live in God.

The horror of such a sin as you mention makes me want to say a couple of things on a personal note.

First, I want to speak to the Youth Minister...**get away from the teens now!** Stop killing the spirit of God’s children with the illness you most definitely need to deal with. Remember what it says in The Gospel of Matthew, “*Whoever welcomes a child for my sake, welcomes me. On the other hand, it would be better for anyone who hurts one of these little ones, to be drowned by a millstone around their neck in the depths of the sea.*” (18:5-6) Again I say to you get away from working or being around teenagers and find some help quickly. I know there is probably a great guilt and fear you may have about being “found out,” but I also know that if you come forward like the adult Christian you claim to be that they will people who will help you in the healing you need.

Second, to the teen...**come forward and tell someone!** Maybe you’ve already done that, but if not, don’t wait another second. You may feel ashamed and guilty for letting yourself get into this pain, but don’t give into those feelings. As long as you stay silent you will remain a prisoner of that other person’s sin. Its time you let God’s love heal your pain and fear. Again I say to you, let

someone know a priest, a parent, a youth minister someone who will help find the peace and healing you need.

Finally, to the person who sent this question in... **make sure you do something about it!** There may be a restriction placed upon a priest because of the need to keep the Sacrament of Reconciliation a place of safety to bring whatever we need to feel forgiveness for to God, but you know something...let somebody know who can make a difference. I say this not just to you, but to everyone who may read this and knows of a situation where an adult is abusing a young person...don't ever be silent. Talk to someone in authority and save everyone involved from going through any more pain.

I'll be praying for all of you.

73.

74. I was the guy at NCYC with the "Priest Wannabe" shirt at the Lifeteen Coffee House. I have a problem. I seriously think that God is calling me to be a priest. I have a girlfriend, and the things we do sometimes don't make me proud. I know God isn't pleased with our relationship, my question is do I just stop having girlfriends and just devote myself now? I'm a sophomore, so do I just live my life like a normal teen? What did you do in that situation?

I took more cold showers that any living person really would consider possible :o)

In reality I see a couple of things that you need to address. First, is this relationship you have right now. It doesn't matter whether you end up a priest or not, you still have to live a chaste life. Not because of the priesthood, but because that is part of the way a good Christian needs to be. I would direct your attention to the section we have on the web site concerning proper use of the gift of our sexuality (the vids by Fr. Dale are really good). Second, if God is calling you the priesthood He is also calling you to a better sense of self-awareness. What I mean by that is this, the more you live your life (always in a good Christian manner), experiencing all the things everyone else your age

experience (like proms and homecomings and trying to convince dads that you really will bring their daughters home by 11:00pm and everything else that goes along with being in High School), the more you will be able to bring those experiences and the wisdom you will gain from having gone through them into your priestly ministry. Every time I deal with a teen, or start talking at Mass or on a Youth Group Retreat I recall all sort of memories from my High School days...I believe it helps me connect. The thing I had to do in High School and the thing you will have to wrestle now is how to have all the experiences and still make sure you witness or faith. I have to be honest, there some things would be going on that I wouldn't approve of and in some cases it made me loose some "friends" in the process. Yet, at other times I know that my being present at some of those parties and not participating in the events gong made some people think about why they are doing it. To this day I still have a group of friends of mine from my High School days who come to the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve and afterward we all get together and reminisce and every year they thank for reminding that there was more to life than "a good time."

As far dating goes...what do you think? Do you feel good about it or not? I was not a big "dater" in High School, not because I was thinking about becoming a priest (because I actually wasn't at that time...that came a few years after High School), but more because I worked a lot. Still those times I did go out I always remembered something someone told me once, "Always think of every person you date as someone else's husband or wife, and make sure you respect their future spouse." And you know what, every girl I dated in High School did marry someone else and I'm to this day happy I didn't do anything to take from their married love.

If you are feeling called to the priesthood...go talk to your priest and ask him to get you in touch with the Vocations Director in your Diocese...and most importantly...pray about it every day. I'll be praying for you.

75. I have been reading the Left Behind books, and in them they talk about "A" Antichrist. I Jon 2 is the only place that I can find "antichrist" but it talks about it being anyone who does not believe in Jesus. That is right, but in the books it describes the antichrist but it does not tell where the writers

found it. I would like where I can find out about the Antichrist. In Revelation 11:7 it talks about a beast that comes up from the abyss, and wages war on the 2 witnesses of God. In the books the Antichrist kills them. Is the beast in Revelation the Antichrist or Satan?

Okay...let's say it again...the Left Behind series of books are fiction...they are not good use of Biblical scholarship and in fact have very little connection with the scriptures with the exception that they use terms and people mentioned in the Bible (and in almost every case they make use of them wrong). So please, if you're going to read them...remember they're just books and have nothing to do with the inspired Word of God that we have in the Bible.

In regards to the "Antichrist" you did your homework in finding that passage in The First Letter of John, the term is used in 2:18-23, its also referred to in The Second Letter to the Thessalonians 2:1-12 and in a number of other places as well (I invited you to check out the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 675-677, there is a great set of reference to be found there). You are also correct in your understanding of what the Antichrist is...it is a term used to describe anyone who is trying to go against the will of God. Now in the literal of senses this could be used to sum up the existence of Satan since he would be most certainly considered the ultimate Antichrist, but the term is also to be used in a much wider way to be seen as anyone who "glorifies himself in place of God and of His Messiah come in the flesh." (paragraph 675).

Thank you for taking the time to look up your references and ask your question...whenever you see something whether its in a book like Left Behind or anywhere else that makes you think the scriptures are being misrepresented always look it up and ask someone if you are still confused. And just as a personal side note...if you want to read some good fiction that has a Christian approach to it, drop the Left Behind series and start reading anything by C.S. Lewis (I really love his book The Screwtape Letters)

76. I was hoping you could settle a debate for me: Is it or is it not disrespectful to kneel on the Altar during the most important part of the Mass.

Respect for the presence of Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist is not found in a particular posture. Whether a person is kneeling, sitting, standing, jogging in place or balancing on one foot...the respect comes from the heart of the person. Kneeling is a relatively new action in the Church (when I say that I mean its only been around for 500 or 600 years...and that's not a long time in our Church) and long before that people stood throughout the entire celebration of the Mass, including the consecration. In fact, if you read the Second Eucharist Prayer (which is the oldest of all the Eucharist prayers, written by Hippolytus way back in the 3rd century...now **that** we could consider a long time) it says, "We thank you for counting us worthy to stand in your presence and we serve you." Why would they say "stand," because they were standing when the prayer was being read.

There is a big debate going on in the Church right now among Liturgist over what is right and what is proper...I won't get into their debate...I just say look to the Holy Father...whatever his posture is, the man is just beaming holiness and love for Christ in the Eucharist. If we can only do a small portion of that...wouldn't it be great.

Each Diocese has rules governing what will be accepted there and the person who sets those rules is the chief Liturgist of any Diocese, your Bishop. My suggestion to you is follow the example of the Holy Father and listen to your Bishop, if he says kneel, then kneel and other than that just keep your mind on the gift of the Eucharist you are about to receive and please don't worry about the rest.

77.

78. *In the part of the Mass when the priest says something along the lines of, "When I say the word, I shall be healed." What "word" are they referring to?*

Actually the priest is praying for God's grace and mercy. The real phrase goes like this, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." The priest prays this

directly before he receives Communion. What he is doing is recognizing that he (like everybody else in the congregation) is in need of the mercy and healing of God. And that without that mercy from God we are truly not worthy to bring His Son into our bodies at the Eucharist. I find that to be one of the most humbling parts of the Mass. A time for me to remember that it was God doing all the work the whole time anyway. Good question, keep it up, the more you learn about what's going on during the Mass the more Mass will come alive for you.

79. *Why do we only say one reading at daily Masses, besides the fact that its shorter?*

Well, that's a big reason...there are people to be ministered to on golf courses all over America and we need early tee times to do it! NOT REALLY I kid...I'm a kidder!

In fact, though, you are partly right. The weekend Mass is intentionally kept shorter than the Sunday celebration because the Sunday celebration that is called "Preeminent." What that means is that when we gather on Sunday it should be a day of greater happiness and should reflect more the idea that we are once again sharing in the Easter joy. You see every Sunday is a sharing in the Easter celebration and so we have to make them more special. So how do we do that...we don't do everything during the week that we will do on Sunday, like bringing back the second reading, adding the singing (although in some places I have seen them sing at daily Mass, most places don't do that), and proclaiming the *Gloria* and the *Creed*. All these things return on Sunday and that adds to the greater time of celebration of the Easter Eucharist we get to participate in ever week.

80.

81.

82. *What's the deal with Stigmata? Is it true? Is it self-inflicted? How do you know?*

Is it self-inflicted? I personally don't know a lot of people who would by choice walk around with their hands and feet bleeding. Sure you would attract a lot of attention, but there is also that nasty side effect of passing out from the loss of blood. And then it just gets in everything, clothes, soups and the occasional CD player.

No, when someone truly receives the stigmata, that is to say, the actual wounds of Christ on their body, it should be seen as a gift and a grace but also as a painful living reminder of the price for our salvation.

The word stigmata comes from the Latin phrase "stigmata" which meant "brand a slave or criminal." St. Paul referred to this in his *Letter to the Galatians* 6:17 when he made mention of bearing the marks of Christ on his body. The first authentic case of a person receiving stigmata was St. Francis of Assisi in 1224. And there have been a number of holy men and women who have also received it, including St. Catherine of Siena and St. Padre Pio.

When a person receives this gift it's not for them, it's not for their own glory but to remind us of Christ's sacrificial suffering and to deepen our own sense of piety and devotion to God. I hope this helps. You're in my prayers.

83. *Is it a sin to think about or to try to commit suicide?*

Let me address the whole notion of suicide not just the idea of sin. The more and more that I minister to teens the more I realize how widespread these feelings of momentary hopelessness are and I have to be real honest I am scared for you because to contemplate or act up on the idea is to forget that life is a gift...a very precious gift! Every minute we have is precious and each moment of our

lives brings us closer to God and His eternal life or moves us away from God's presence. It is our choice. God's greatest gift to his children is free will. We choose. Everyday we choose. A thousand times a day we choose God or we choose to walk away. Some make the choice and give back the gift. What do they miss out on? How much beauty, joy, and happiness that was theirs for the taking and is just gone. Not to mention the love and joy they brought to their families. Everyone loses when we don't accept the gift of life. God doesn't just put us here and set us loose to do whatever we want. There are boundaries and rules for life and living. I don't have to tell you the rules. You know them. They have been poured out to you by your parents, your brothers and sisters, the Church and even by your priests and youth ministers. You know what the rules are; you know what God expects in response to His gift. Just choose to live. I don't mean choose life over suicide. It's bigger than that. Choose to live every moment to it's greatest potential. Bring as much love and kindness into the world and into your own life as you can. Remember that to receive love, joy, and happiness in your life you will have to bring these to others. Don't be afraid to reach out. Don't be afraid to give your heart away. Don't be afraid to make room for family, children and friends. Build close friendships with people who share the same values you have. Occasionally ask yourself if the people who surround your life bring you closer to God or pull you away from His presence. Then choose. The choices of life are about today, tomorrow and eternity. Choose well my friends, and know you are in my prayers.

84. *What proof can I give others that the Pope exercised powering in the early Church. Before Constantine but after Peter died?*

Well, you see if you go to Rome today you will still see a little café that stands near the Coliseum, it was there that all the early Popes

used to hang out and drink cappuccinos all day. They didn't start working until the Middle Ages...Not!

In reality, the Popes were very active leaders in this early period of the Church's life, between the death of St. Peter, which is usually around the years 65 to 70 A.D. and the year 313 A.D. when Constantine made Christianity legal. Having said that the Popes of this time were active I think you need to keep in mind two things though. First is that in this period the Church was at the heights of ten great persecutions that began with Nero in 64 A.D. and ended with Diocletian in 305 A.D. and so many of the early Popes such as Popes Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus I, Cornelius, as well as Fabian and Sixtus II, spent most of their time either standing up to an Emperor or facing down some wild animal that was about to eat them in the Coliseum. The second thing to keep in mind is that the title "Pope," although used earlier, is not really applied to the Bishop of Rome until Pope Damasus in 382 A.D.

Now having said all this there are some notable Popes during the time between St. Peter and Constantine. Let's name a few shall we...I think we shall. In 185 A.D. St. Irenaeus in his book "*Adversus Haereses*" mentions Linus as having received the authority to be Bishop of Rome from St. Peter himself. At the end of the second century Pope Victor announces that the celebration of Easter will be held at the same time throughout the entire Christian world. In 256 A.D. Pope Stephen makes the first public proclamation that the Sacrament of Baptism should be only received once in a lifetime in his letter to the Bishop of Carthage. And way back in 96 A.D. we have Pope Clement I writing his letter to the Corinthians which sets in place the hierarchy of the Church much the same way it still pretty much is today.

Now I could go on, but I hope this has been enough to prove the point that the Popes rule and the Emperors drool!

85. You know the bible contradicts it's self all the time, like when it says an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth but the whole idea Jesus preached was to forgive. How do we know which bits to believe? And how can we trust it?

Well I am probably going to get into a bunch of trouble for not referring a bible question to the "Bible Geek", but I am answering this question.

Alright, in the particular passage you mention there is not a contradiction present at all. In fact, it shows how the scriptures illustrate the development of God's plan through time. You see, if we look where the passage, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" from the *Book of Exodus* 21:24 comes from the Old Testament we see that it's in the passage called "The Law of Talon." And if you read the whole chapter it's basically telling you to respect people and their property or else suffer an equal amount of pain or injury that you would have inflicted on them (and after reading it through, I was pretty convinced). However as God's plan unfolds and his son Jesus Christ comes to establish a new law of love this position changes, so that when you read "An eye for eye, tooth for tooth" in the *Gospel of Matthew* 5:38 it doesn't end there. Jesus goes on to tell them that the old "Law of Talon" no longer applies to His followers because they are called to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors. Which means there is no contradiction at all, one law passes away to make room for the greater law...it's a sign of spiritual growth and development.

Thanks for the question, hope my answer helps and know that I am praying for you.

86. What gave Christians the right to change the Sabbath day from Saturday to Sunday?

Well let me begin by saying that we are not talking about “rights.” Rights have to deal with legal issues of governmental law. The placement of the Sabbath day had nothing to do with either forms of that law. The Commandments are clear when we speak about the Law of God, are to keep holy the Sabbath. And when we read in the *Book of Genesis* that this Sabbath should be placed on the seventh day we know from this that one out of seven days we need to give back to the Lord, but then again this doesn’t mention any particular day of the week does it? In the early Christian Church it began very quickly that they celebrate the day after the traditional Jewish Sabbath as a remembrance of Christ’s Resurrection. This is important on a number of different levels, one to signify a new order of Creation brought about through Jesus’ Passion, Death and Resurrection. And this new Creation is the beginning of the “eighth day” (if you want to read some really good stuff on this I recommend Scott Hahn’s book, *The Lamb’s Supper*). You see with the saving act of Jesus as a thanksgiving not only for being Creation, but also for being redeemed. The Church explains it this way, “but for us a new day has dawned: the day of Christ’s Resurrection. The seventh day completes the first Creation. The eighth day begins the new Creation. Thus, the work of Creation culminates in the greater work of redemption. The first Creation finds its meaning and its summit in the new Creation in Christ, the splendor of redemption. The first surpasses that of the first creation” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 349). So you can see that it’s not change it’s growth and the desire to celebrate the salvation we have all gained through Jesus Christ. I hope this helps keep the questions coming. You are in my prayers.

[87. With recent events like the sniper attacks, what does the Catholic Church believe about the electric chair?](#)

The Church’s position on capital punishment has not changed and I don’t see it changing over something like these recent events. I

don't see how they really can because the truth that we speak as a Church when it comes to Christ's law of love cannot be changed. Remember what was said in the Gospel of Matthew 5:38-46, "You have heard the commandment, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." But that what I say to you is: offer no resistance to injury. When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other. You have heard the commandment, you shall love your countryman but hate your enemy.' My commandment, 'you shall love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and the good, he rains on the just and unjust." From this it seems pretty clear that Christ wants us to forgive and to be open to the possibility of even the worst, murderous and violent of sinners to repent and to receive His mercy.

When we look in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 2267 we see, "Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor." And again if we continue later on in that section it says, "Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively for preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm- without definitely taking away from the possibility of redeeming himself- the cases in which the execution of the offender is absolutely necessary "are very rare, if not practically nonexistent."

Why? Because we as Christians are not a people of revenge. We must always be a people of hope and peace. We hope for healing of any pain and suffering that was caused through any acts of violence. And we pray for peace that will let God's mercy, and not human law alone guide our actions.

Please remember in your prayers all the people's lives that were forever changed through acts of violence and also don't forget "to pray for our persecutors."

88. I just recently ended a relationship with an atheist. Was I wrong for going out with him in the first place? While I dated him, I totally felt like I could convince him that Catholicism is a wonderful thing. Instead, I felt like I was offending the Lord. Was I wrong for going out with my atheist boyfriend?

Not in the least. Please, don't feel guilty about that choice in your life. If your intent was to show yourself as a person of faith and to maybe try to encourage him to see beyond the narrow, lonely view of the world atheism professes, then I don't see anything you should be guilty about.

I do hope that you might have learned something from all this though. That people will change when they are ready, not when we want them to. I met so many people throughout my time as a priest who tried to "change" the people that they had in their lives. Some demanding total make over of the other person's life. Some just wanting them to like the same stuff they liked. But in every one of those cases, the people who did change did it because they felt it to be the right time for them to change. The few times when someone "changed" just to make the other person happy...eventually both sides of the couple start to feel miserable.

I offer you an example from Pope JP II's life. He had a dream, a constant prayer that his people in Poland would be free...that the walls of terror and religious oppression would come to an end. He worked and prayed for this for decades and we all know that the walls did come down and religious freedom returned. But it wasn't because the Holy Father **pushed** his in and forced them to change. Instead, he **prayed** his way into their hearts and got the

whole world to join in that prayer. That's how God calls us to work, through letting us show Him.

You did nothing wrong...in fact I encourage you for caring so much about this young man and keep praying for him. It may take a while, but prayer has been known to change the world, maybe your prayers for him may open his heart to change when he is ready to hear God's call.

89. I may soon be traveling to Russia. Since there are few Catholic Churches there I was wondering whether or not Catholics are allowed to receive Communion in the Orthodox Church. I know the Catholic Church recognizes the Orthodox Church as equal, but I don't know whether their Sacraments can also be received by Catholics?

This is an excellent question...and for an answer I'll turn it over to our correspondent in Moscow...so what do you think?
Well Fr. J, all I can say is, **I'M COLD AND I WANT TO COME HOME!!!** Now back to you.

Okay, all kidding aside...this really is a good question. The history behind your question is really long and I could talk for hours on it. But I'm afraid that if I did most people would leave the website and go check out the newest on the Sponge bob Square pants site they have over at Nickelodeon. So instead, I'll be quick...

There had been a long dispute between the Western Church and Eastern Church for many years since before the Council of Nice in 325 A.D. as the two sides continually saw their views of faith getting farther and farther apart by the time of the height of the Crusades came along and the Turkish army invaded Constantinople and the West at the Council of Florence chose not to help the Eastern Catholics in their struggle that became the final sta

wandthepointwheretheOrthodoxChurchesslipfromtheCatholicChurchRussiathenmadeitofficialin1443whentheycondemnedtheir own Catholic Bishop and placed another one in charge...relationships have beentenseeversince.

90. I have belly button pierced. How does the Church feel about that?

That it probably hurt like the dickens when you got it.

If you're asking about the whole "body piercing" question, well I have to say, that the Catholic Church has not made an official statement for or against it practice (and boy, is M@ happy about that...have you seen that boy's ears...he's got more hoops than the whole NBA).

I would hope though, that anyone who is under the age of 18 gets there parent permission before piercing a part of themselves and also make sure it its something you really want to do, because you're going to have that hole in your body for a very long time.

91

92.

93. I think I pray enough, but I am not Circumcised, and I was reading the bible and it said you must be circumcised when you are eight days old or you are not one of God's people, does that mean I am not?

Yes, it does, it absolutely does, it whole-heartedly does, and it unequivocally does... **NOT** mean that you are separated from God's people. The passage that you are making reference to, I

think, is from the *Book of Leviticus 12:3* which says “On the eighth day, the flesh of the boy’s foreskin shall be circumcised,” and that does apply as a law for the Jews (and still does), but not for Christians.

Let’s take a little trip back in history, shall we? In the early days of the Church, there was a great debate as to whether or not converts needed to become Jewish before becoming Christian part of this involving the act of circumcision; however, all of this changed after the first Council of Jerusalem, when James, Peter, Paul and all of the other Apostles agreed the circumcision would not be necessary to receive baptism (check out *Acts of the Apostles*, chap. 15). Paul himself would later write, “Was someone called after he had been circumcised? He should not try to hide his circumcision. Did the call come to another who had been circumcised? Circumcision counts for nothing, and its lack makes no difference either. What matters is keeping God’s commandments” (*1 Corinthians 7:18-19*). And he was right! As Christians we need to be about living our lives for righteousness, otherwise we can all be circumcised, shave our heads bald, paint our finger nails in weird colors and none of that will bring us to salvation. Only living for Christ and loving our neighbors does that.

94. What is the Church’s teaching on being an organ donor?

Make sure you’re dead first. Otherwise it will really hurt when they take them.

Seriously though, the church’s position on organ donation is one of acceptance. It’s important to be able to leave the gifts of organs that may be used to save lives, the heart that will go to a young man who’s own heart is failing him, the liver that will go to a child, who’s own liver never formed. I remember a bumper sticker

I saw one time. It was actually quite good. It read, “Don’t take your organs with you to heaven, heaven know we need them here.” And I think that it is true. Even the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks about it when we read in paragraph 2296. “Organ donation after earth is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as a an expression of generous solidarity.

It’s very easy to do. You can make stipulations that you would like to be an organ donor when you get your drivers license, and you can make arrangements with it through your will. It was a very thoughtful question and especially at this time of year, a very necessary question to remind ourselves to stay open to giving all kinds of gifts, including the gift, literally of ourselves.

95. My friend bought a rosary about a week ago. A couple minutes later he noticed that is had 7 decades on the rosary. My youth minister told me it was a Benedictine rosary and it had 2 extra mysteries. What are the 2 extra mysteries?

Well, let me start off by saying that it is not a “Benedictine rosary” it’s actually called a Franciscan Crown or Seraphic Rosary. This type of rosary has 7 decades that was introduced by the Franciscan Order in 1422. The total number of beads on the rosary should equal up to 72. This was done in keeping with tradition that Mary was 72 at the time of her death and Assumption. In this particular rosary, also, it has a different set of mysteries (actually they’re called “Joys.”) They are as follows:

1. The Annunciation
2. The Visitation
3. The Nativity
4. The Adoration of the Wise Men
5. The Finding in the Temple

6. The Appearance of the Risen Christ to His Mother and Apostles
7. The Assumption and Coronation of Mary

That was a really cool gift that you were given! I hope you pray it often.

96. If I have done something I know is wrong (masturbation), and I don't feel comfortable telling a priest that sin, does God forgive me even if I don't bring it up in Confession?

The question that you bring up is a really good one and one that many people ask. And my answer is always the same...yes and no.

The “yes” part comes in when we know that God’s mercy is not confined and He can choose to forgive whomever He wishes and whatever He wishes. However, the “no” part starts up when we reflect that there is a reason why Jesus told his disciples to forgive sin. Remember what we read in *The Gospel of John 20: 22-23*, “Then he breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men’s sins, they are forgiven; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.” That was because Jesus wanted his followers, in particular those that would inherit the authority of the apostles (bishops and priests), to continue to be instruments of His forgiveness. I’ve said this a couple of times in answers that since there is no such thing as a private sin and that every sin is an act of pride and selfishness, the act of forgiveness for those sins must also be communal (the priest represents the entire community), and it must also be an act of humility.

You don’t ever have to worry about being judged or being thought less of. Trust me, I hear tons of stuff every week and I don’t remember any of them. Why? Not because I have a bad memory,

but because those sins are between the person who confesses them and God. My role is very simple as a priest and that is just to tell you that you're forgiven.

I realize that in the cases, especially of sexual sin like the one you mentioned, that there is a lot of guilt involved. But it is also that guilt that keeps you trapped in the sin. God does not want you to be trapped in the sin. He wants you to live in His love. I would encourage you to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you feel weird about standing in line on a Saturday afternoon, then call up and make an appointment or catch one of the priest after Mass. But don't let any fear keep you from receiving the mercy of God. I'll be praying for you and I hope it works out.

97. I heard that when we die we are tempted by the devil one last time before we go to heaven and that he tempts us with the earthly possession that we desire most. I had never heard this before. Is that true? If it is, what if we give in to that temptation?

Then you are doomed to an eternity of watching Mariah Carey movies! Yes, an endless stream of "Glitter" clips bombarding you from every side! This is what awaits those who do not pass the temptation test!

Honestly though, I have to tell you I've never heard of this one before. That doesn't mean that its not out there somewhere, some tale that was passed on from generation to generation to keep little girls and boys in line, but I can't find a reference to it either in the Scriptures or in any of the teaching of the Church. So I'm just going to have to say don't worry about it.

Live well now, be holy, and "Do what is right in His sight" (*The Book of Deuteronomy 13:19*). And don't ever let any "rumored

temptation” bring you to worry or fear. God’s mercy will get you through everything as long as you trust in him.

98. Is practicing Anarchism a bad thing? Do we have to respect the government if we don’t want to?

As I begin the answer to this question I want to be real clear about something. I know that Anarchism is a popular fad right now among a lot of teens. Heck, every generation, mine included, has had issues with authority, governmental policy, parents, and even the Church, because when we’re young we know everything. But the belief in Anarchism is a serious matter. It’s not just a disrespect for government, it’s a desire to have all government cease to be. A true Anarchist believes the only real authority is their own personal conscience.

The Catholic Church has always taught respect for legitimate governmental authority, “Each person rightly owes loyalty to the communities of which they are a part and respect to those in authority who have charge of the common good.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1880). And we also read in Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*, “Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him, for there is no authority except from God, and all authority that exists is established by God. As a consequence, the man who opposes authority rebels against the ordinance of God; those who resist thus shall draw condemnation down upon themselves.” (13:1-2). So you can see the Church’s position is clearly one of respect for legitimate government authority.

Okay, having said of all this I know that any true Anarchist could care less what I say because I myself would be seen as an authority figure that has no right to dictate my beliefs to anyone other than myself. A diehard Anarchist who might be reading this right now is waving their arms in the air and spouting off words (many of

which cannot be repeated by me) that support their own position of chaos (by the way, “chaos” is used in the official Webster’s definition of the word “anarchy”). We as Christians must never be about chaos or disrespect or anarchy. We are a people of love and respect and order. That was the whole point of Christ’s coming into the world, to bring order back to the chaos that had been created in original sin. Why anyone would you want to go back to that, I have no idea.

99. I’ve always felt a calling to work as a missionary in a 3rd world country, but as a teenager, are there any opportunities through the church for me to do this?

Rework this answer

This is an excellent question. And it shows that you’re heart is directed towards the poor and less fortunate. That’s really cool! And yes, there are many different opportunities for young people to work in “third world situations,” some within our country and some outside. Take for example, at my parish; we sponsor a mission in the Dominican Republic. The entire parish provides food, medical supplies, money as needed, and most importantly, provides manpower through different trips taken by parishioners throughout the course of the year. One of the most popular events the youth group does every year is the trip that they take to the mission to help teach, and sometimes build, but most of all, to experience and to pray with the people of this small town. I know a number of parishes throughout the country that do similar things. There might be one close to you. If so, check it out. There is also organizations around the country that specialize in summer experiences of working with the poor, like Catholic HEART Work Camp and you can check them out at their web site (www.heartworkcamp.com/heart-new.htm).

100. Why is cursing so bad? If the word is used without meaning harm to anyone, then who becomes offended? Also if curse words change with the times then wouldn't any word I use in place of a curse word be just as bad?

What kind of #@%*!*\$ question is this that you are asking me? I can't believe my #@^&\$#\$#%*!@#%^ ears, asking such a #@!&^#@ things.

Cursing is wrong because the person that is offended is God Himself. Why? Because you are asking God to condemn someone or something that He lovingly created. That's what a curse is. If it's said without meaning, then what's the point of saying them? And curse words do not change with every generation, slang changes. And slang words do not apply to what we are talking about here. A curse is specific. It is meant to bring God's wrath and anger down and not just to be said because someone doesn't know what else to say.

My grandfather used to say, "God gave us a tongue for one reason and one reason only, to praise and glorify His name. And if you're not going to use it for that, I have no problem taking it back." And the Scriptures speak of the importance of language when we read, "A man advances himself by his words, a prudent man pleases God" (*The Book of Sirach 20:26*). So I guess my point is this, just be careful with the words you use. Everything we should be about is professing blessings, not curses. Let the love of God and His gentle spirit dictate the choice of words you use.

101. God calls us to love everyone. Should we love the devil?

Short answer...Yes!

Longer answer...it's still Yes, but a few Scripture passages that might be helpful to pray about. "My command to you is: Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are children of your heavenly Father, for His son rises on the bad and the good, he reigns on the just and unjust." (*The Gospel of Matthew 5:44-45*). And then there is, "Love your enemy and do good. Lend without expecting repayments. Then our recompense will be great. You will rightly be called children of the Most High, since He himself is good to the ungrateful and the wicked"(*The Gospel of Luke 6:35-36*). So, yes, you do have to love Satan. He may be the ultimate enemy, but God still loves him, even though he doesn't love God. And so we must have pity and love him as well.

Now that doesn't mean we want to be hanging out with him, spending quality time, taking long walks together, and try to get to know him better. No, you want to stay as far away from his evil as possible. But if we hated him, then we're just being more like him. And let's all try to be like our Father instead, always trying to live in the spirit of love.

102. Someone at my Church said that only Catholics would go to heaven, because Catholicism is the only true religion. This bothers me I have many friends who aren't Catholic but very religious. Is this true?

Well, be bothered no more, because that's just not the case. The Catholic Church teaches that since Christ selected the Apostles and taught those Apostles. Then through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they began the Church, the Church which is now known as the Catholic Church, that because of all this we would be seen as the true Christian Church and most perfect of all

Christian Churches in our teaching and Sacraments. This does not mean; however, that people outside of the Catholic Church are kept away from the possibility of Salvation. Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection redeemed all of Creation and therefore opened the way for all people who accept His Divine gift of Eternal Life.

During the Second Vatican Council there was a whole document written on our ministry to people outside the Church especially those on the Protestant Churches and I would remind anyone who would say that other Christian faiths cannot be saved to read the following: "It follows that the separated Churches and communities as such, though we believed they suffer from the defects already mentioned, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which deprive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church." (Decree on Ecumenism, section 3, paragraph 4)

So please don't worry any more about your non-Catholic friends. If they lead good lives and keep God's commandments they'll be okay.

103. Why do we choose a Saint's name at Confirmation? What is the purpose?

Well you see the practice originally began in a small Midwestern town not too far from Fargo, North Dakota where all the young children by sheer coincidence had been named by their parents the same name, Gretchen. Now having an entire town with the generation of the children named Gretchen, as lovely as that name is, was a bit confusing. They would call out their names in classrooms and all of them would raise their hands! It got out of

control. So they came up with the idea that on their Confirmation they would each receive a different name, a name of a saint, and they would all be called by these new names and end the time of confusion. And so the town was saved and the people rejoiced. Okay, now for the real answer. The receiving of a name at Confirmation has a number of different sources in the history of the church. But the biggest one comes from the idea of a name being associated with a change of life. When Jesus told Simon that his new name was now Peter (Matthew 16:18), it was because his role was changing and he was going to be asked to take on a role of leadership. When Saul had his great conversion, the risen Lord gave him the name Paul (Acts 13:9). And there are a number of others that we see this happen to as well because there is a power in a name. If we look back at the Old Testament, to name someone was to have ownership of them, which is why when Moses asked God in the burning bush who was sending him to Pharaoh, God didn't give him his name, He gave him his title, "I am who am" (Exodus 3:14). So to take on a new name at confirmation also carries with it the idea that you are asking for the Lord to change you. To take ownership of you like He's never done before and to live your faith more fully and with more life than you could've imagined. The name of the saint also should have some significance to you, that particular saint is an example of the type of holiness you would like. Some people take St. Francis because they want to be kind to animals, or some people take St. Joseph because they want to be as holy as he was, or some people take St. Monica because she had such patience with her children, and the list could go on. The idea is to pick somebody who says something about you. And when you stand before the Bishop on the day of your Confirmation and you tell him your name, say it with a pride and with a conviction and with knowledge that the Holy Spirit is going to change you forever.

104. I heard that missing Mass is a mortal sin. Is it? If it is, why is it a mortal sin?

Good question. Let's start by breaking down the meaning of mortal sin. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church sin "is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as 'an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.' (paragraph 1849)

Sounds pretty bad, huh? To put it a little more basically, it's choosing something that you know is wrong, and doing it anyway. It harms your relationship with God, because you have broken out of the loving boundaries that He has set for us.

Now a mortal sin is when you do something really bad, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "for a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be met: 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.' (Paragraph 1857)

So who is being wronged if you don't go to Mass? Well, first of you're harming your relationship with God by you're choosing not to spend time with Him in His home or to receive His Holy Presence. Then you hurt the whole community by depriving them of your joining the worship and praise of God at Mass (we might not think about it a lot but each person at Mass brings a special quality that no one else can bring, when someone is missing, then the whole celebration is different).

Are there any red lights flashing you, saying "Danger! Danger Will Robinson!!" (Well, if there are, please seek help from a professional in the mental health field.) Still, I'll try to sum this up as briefly as possible: Yes, missing Mass on Sunday could be

considered a mortal sin. Unless of course you're in a situation that makes you unable to attend Mass, you're really sick. That can't be helped. You didn't plan on being sick. You didn't wake up Sunday morning and pull a "Ferris Bueller." But if the reason you're unable to attend Mass is because you wouldn't get up when your mom or dad told you to, that's a sin. Or if you think there's this really cool party or TV show that you should be at or watching and decide to skip out on Mass, which would be a sin too.

God only asks we go worship Him once a week, and usually doesn't take much longer than an hour or so (Depending on your priest and whether the Life Teen band is playing). And in return He offers us the gift of His Son in Eucharist and His Word for us to live by through the scriptures. All in all, I think it's a pretty good idea!

105. Recently, the whole cloning issue has been all over the news and newspapers. I have one question. Do cloned babies (if there are any) have a soul?

You are so right about this topic of cloning beings all over the place. It's almost self-replicating (I'm sorry, a little clone humor...notice however, that I'm not going with the easy "Attack of the Clone" references that would be simple to pull up at this moment). Seriously though it is a huge issue right now and one I think there will be discussion and debate about for quite some time. It opens a new chapter in a discussion that has been going on as long as people have used their minds to ask the question, "If I can build something, does it necessarily make it right for me to build it."

Before I actually answer your question, let me give everybody who might not be familiar with the idea of cloning some of the basic biology behind it. It all starts with a cell. All living things are

made up of cells, and each cell of the body contains a nucleus (except red blood cells, but that's another story). The nucleus contains chromosomes and chromosomes contain a nucleus (except red blood cells, but that is another story). The nucleus contains chromosomes and chromosomes contain some genes that tell our bodies what they are supposed to look like. Now there are 46 chromosomes in the human body. 23 are called somatic cells and 23 are gametes. The reason why gametes only have 23 chromosomes is so that when a sperm unites with an egg during fertilization, the resulting cell will have the full 23 pairs of chromosomes needed for normal development. This fertilized cell is called a zygote (that's Greek for, "tiny being").

Cloning is done by taking an egg cell, extracting its nucleus, and replacing it with a nucleus from a somatic cell, that is, a nucleus with 23 pair of chromosomes. The resulting first stage of clone is a zygote or a one-celled embryo. As can be seen, cloning bypasses sexual reproduction, directly injecting a somatic nucleus into an egg, without the use of sperm.

Presently, some scientists and politicians are talking about the distinction between "reproductive cloning" and "therapeutic cloning" of human beings. In reproductive cloning, the embryo is implanted into the womb of a woman and allowed to grow to full term, resulting in a baby. In therapeutic cloning, the embryo is grown in a petri dish in the lab for about a week and then dismembered to obtain stem cells. The distinction between the two types of cloning is a biotechnical distinction without a moral difference; both are a crass manipulation of the intrinsic dignity of life. Even the Catholic Church is thoroughly opposed to both types of cloning, therapeutic cloning in a sense is even more gruesome, because it creates a new human life with the specific purpose of destroying this person for experimentation.

Either way we're talking about becoming a new type of Dr. Frankenstein, creating life from the parts of other people (in this case, their DNA). And in the process leaving God out of the equation and if God is out of the picture, then the issue of a soul becomes more real. Because as it states in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "The soul, the 'seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material,' can have its origin only in God" (Paragraph 33).

So you can see there are a lot of reasons why the Church stands against cloning, from the creating of life for the purpose of killing them, to the question of the soul and many others that could be brought up. I hope this has been a little help to you, yet there is so much more to this issue that I know we'll be seeing it again soon somewhere on the website.

106. Recently I attended a retreat and I met this incredible guy named Matt and he seems so perfect for me! But when he went up to talk he said he was going to be a priest, is it bad for me to wish that he wasn't interested in the priesthood? I can't stop thinking about him. I think he's my soul mate!

No it is not bad to think that! It's a perfectly natural reaction. We all have thoughts that are going to be unfulfilled. ☺ I mean, if this young man is really being called to the priesthood, he is going to go there. If he's not, you got a shot! But I wouldn't worry about it too much, because the reality is, if eh is really looking for his vocation, he needs to search that out first before he would ever recognize anyone else as a possible "soul mate."

Let me give you an example. When I was in the seminary, there two friends of mine. Both of them had very similar experiences to the one that you mentioned, when they had very similar experiences to the one that you mentioned, when they were at

retreats and the ladies just fell in love with them. Well, my friend, number 1, realized that his calling was to be a priest and so he never responded to the affections of the young lady who wanted to know him. Whereas, the other friend came to the conclusion that God had put this woman in his path because they were truly good together. He ended up leaving the seminary, marrying her and they now have three children and are very happy. My other friend, like myself, went on and we were both ordained in the same year and are happy too.

What your prayer should be and what his prayer should be is that both of you will be open to the promptings of God, because like I said, if he is truly being called to the priesthood, nothing will ever get in his way. And maybe, if that happens, it is because God has someone else waiting for you. Either way, if you trust in Him, it will work out.

107.

108. What can I do to spread the word of God throughout my school?

A few months ago I was walking in the mall with a friend of mine and he challenged me to get the attention of as many people as I could without saying a word. I'm always up for a good challenge (besides we were betting a lunch on this and I was really in the mood for a steak hoagie). So I went to a dollar store and I bought the brightest red ball I could find. And I walked out of the store, put the ball in my two hands and raised it over my head. And just started walking around staring at the ball raised in my hands up in the air. Within about ten minutes there was a fairly large group of people gathered around me wondering what that lunatic was doing. I kept doing it for a couple more minutes and the crowd got a little

larger. My friend came over and accepted defeat and we went and had lunch on him. The point of this story is to show you that it's not that hard to get people's attention. It's what you do with it that matters. You can either be silly or give something to them that matters. When St. Francis of Assisi, "*Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary use words.*" Or when St. Paul wrote "*Your attitude must be that of Christ.*" (The Letter to the Phillipians 2:6) Both of them were meaning the same thing in the idea that the best way to proclaim your faith is to show it. Show it your actions. Show it in your relationships. Don't be afraid to be a person of faith at every moment. And if people ask why you make certain choices, tell them it is based on your faith. You choose not to run with the party crowd. Why? Because of your faith. You choose to be chaste. Why? Because of your faith. Some people look at you like your holding a red ball in the air and wonder why you want to have faith. But there will also be a great deal of people who will look at you and say, "If they can do it, so can I."

That's on a personal level. On a community level you can join some of the organizations or start new ones. Recently I heard about a Life Teen parish that started a Life Teen Club at their school and it's quickly growing to be one of the largest Christian clubs in their high school. But whether you do it personally or with a group of people, just make sure you do something. And as long as you do it in prayer, and with a desire to show your Catholic faith, God will do great things with it. I'll be praying for you.

109. I have a few related questions: What are indulgences? What do they do for you? What is the difference between a plenary and partial indulgence? Thanks.

I have this friend who is convinced that indulgences were when she was able to skip classes, go to the mall, and buy a dress that she would never wear and then spend the rest of the day watching

“soaps” and “Oprah.” That would be more indulgent than an indulgence. An Indulgence is the remission of punishment for sins that that have been committed or confessed. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says it this way, “The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance,” (paragraph 1471). And that every sin has a double consequence, in that it involves both spiritual and physical effects, so “every sin, even venial...must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state of Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called ‘temporal punishment of sin.’” (paragraph 1472). So the Church is given the graces to help the faithful overcome this punishment and “intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due to their sins.” (paragraph 1478). So basically you can see them as a backup plan, or extra credit, so you can avoid going to Purgatory.

You also asked what the difference is between Partial and Plenary Indulgences. Well, let’s start with Partial Indulgences. They are actions or prayers that a person does and in return they receive a partial reduction of the punishment of Purgatory. This started back in the Middle Ages when people called “pardoners” who were licensed or certified preachers given the task to solicit alms for building of churches and sponsoring for the crusades. Partial Indulgences include the following.

1. Praying the Magnificat or Hail Holy Queen
2. Praying the Acts of Faith, Hope and Love, and the Creed
3. Making the sign of the cross
4. Visiting the Blessed Sacrament
5. Visiting a cemetery

Now the Plenary Indulgences is when you perform an action or prayer along with meeting certain conditions that will bring along

full remission of punishment. The conditions are that you have to do all of the following three things:

1. Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation
2. Receiving Communion at Mass
3. Praying for the Holy Father

And they doing one of these following actions of prayers:

1. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least one-half hour
2. Scripture reading for at least one-half hour
3. Recite the Way of the Cross
4. Rosary praying in a church or with a family group or religious community

There are also a whole bunch of other Indulgences that are out there and plenty of resources to find them. But since I'm just giving short answers I hope this helps clear up what Indulgences are and how to use them. Have a Blessed Day.

110. My Mom and I were talking about it, and is Yoga against Church teaching or not? It's supposed to be good for your body, but it also has some "prayers" that you're supposed to do too. And supposedly it's and offshoot from Buddhism. So what's the deal?

Let me unfold my legs and turn off my relaxation music before I answer your question.

Man, the reality is that the day of my being able to my legs have long since moved into the realms of fantasy and pretty sure Creed is not considered "relaxation music." Still I don't think that there is anything contrary to our faith for anyone who wants to try to Yoga. I asked a friend of mine who is a Yoga and is also a very

strong Catholic what the deal was with Yoga and he told me that if Yoga is taught authentically is not against Church teaching. It is not an offshoot of Buddhism or Hinduism; it's a nonsectarian (that means it's not attached to any particular religion) practice that can help you remove the distractions in your mind that can turn you away from your faith. My friend went on to inform me that anyone who is looking into a Yoga instructor they need to make sure that they aren't someone who got into Yoga because they were upset with their own religion and now lives Yoga as "pseudoreligion" that they want to inflict on you. A good instructor should use a person's faith experience and spiritual practices to help them be more at peace with meditating within their Church.

Now, this is not an endorsement of Yoga... "Hey man, Fr. J said we gotta go out do that Yoga thing!" "Whoa...man, Fr. J wants us to us to go hang with the little green guy from "Stars Wars?" NOT!

All I'm saying is that if you are doing Yoga and it's not a distraction to your faith...go for it. But be aware, ask questions and make sure that any meditation that's done is focused on Jesus Christ.

111. I LOVE Church. I spend as much time as my schedule allows at my parish, my CORE members, my youth minister, and my priests. The feeling I get during Mass is unexplainable. My priests blow me away. I want to be a priest, there's nothing I'd rather do. There's one problem, I'm a girl. Do you think that Church will change her mind about women and the priesthood anytime soon?

You bring up a very interesting dilemma...does God call people to vocations they cannot live out? The answer, of course, is no. With every vocation God calls someone to, He also gives them the gifts to perform. Remember what St. Paul said in his First Letter to the Corinthians, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different kinds of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone." (12:4-6) And if you continue reading on through the rest of that Chapter you'll see how St. Paul lists all sorts of gifts to be used for the spreading of God's Word. That, I believe, is the more important anyway...if you are feeling such a call to be witness of prayer and holiness in your parish community then don't limit yourself to just being able to be that example only as a priest.

I remember when I first started looking at how God wanted to use me in my life, I thought for sure it was going to be a monk. I loved the idea of praying all day and not having to talk to anybody if I didn't want to. I thought they were the coolest people I had ever met and I was convinced that was how I was going to live out my service to God...maybe even become the next Thomas Merton (I'd call my book "The Seven Page Hill"...get it, he wrote "The Seven Story Mountain"...get it? Okay, forget I even mentioned it that part <><). Then one day I realized that would never happen...because I didn't have the gifts to be a monk...I discovered, for all my wanting it, God had other plans and I have to admit, I like what He had in mind better than my plan.

Keep on LOVING your Church and spending time in worship, praise and community...but look to the gifts (including the fact that you are a girl...that's a gift too you know) you have to open yourself up to what the Spirit has in store. I promise if you do...God will really let great things come out of you.

112.

113. *The priests in my area aren't that great (they are against the pope, etc.) I cant' drive to another parish, what should I do?*

Wow, that's a pretty sad situation you describe there. I can't believe even begin to imagine what that must be like for you, but I also see a great hope in your message as well. Let me explain.

You see I think so often we put such a great emphasis on the role of the priest as minister that sometimes we forget that we all share a responsibility to hold each other accountable. I mean, there have been times when I've mistakenly said something that has offended someone during one of my homilies and if that person comes to let me know that what I have said was offensive I genuinely am grateful. Because I want to bring people closer to Christ, yet sometimes my humanity gets in the way and at times like that its good to know someone is holding me to a higher standard.

Now in your case I would say these priests need to be reminded what their role really is as a leader of prayer and faith in the community. Remember what it says in *The Letter of Paul to Titus* about the qualifications of an ordained minister. They must be men of "irreproachable" character, not "self-willed" or "arrogant," or be "violent," "greedy," or a "drunkard." Instead, they should be "hospitable," "a lover of goodness," "steady," just, holy, and self-controlled." And more directly to what you're situation is...a priest must teach "the authentic message, so that he will be able both to encourage people of God the Church's teaching, a teaching inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to all of us.

You and the people of your parish should remind your priests that they are to teach the Catholic Faith, not what they might want the Catholic Church to be like. I firmly believe that when it comes to Church teaching that I must never give someone my opinion, because my opinion doesn't matter. I'm called by virtue of my

office as a priest to give the people of God the Church's teaching, a teaching inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to all of us,

The Pope wrote a document for the priests called, *I will Give You Shepherds (Pastores Dabo Vobis)*, for anyone out there who likes to impress their friends at the parties with their knowledge of Latin...please tell y'all do that, I mean I can't be the only one...I'm alone aren't I?) where he states "priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the one high priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to his care." (that's from paragraph 15 in case you want to get your priest to look it up)

The last encouragement I would leave is this...when I was a young man there was a division in my parish over something the pastor wanted to do. I don't really remember anymore what it was all about, but at the time it had people leaving the parish right and left. One day I ran into lady who had been very vocal against the pastor position and I asked her why she had chosen to stay in the parish after so many people had chosen to leave and she said, "No one will take me from my Jesus! I may not always agree with him, but that priest brings me Christ every day, and nothing will ever stop me from receiving Him." Don't be discouraged, be strengthened in your faith and try to remind your priest to be the ministers your parish and our Church needs.

114. I go to a Catholic high school and feel certain that I am called to be a nun. How do I (or am I even correct about this) explain to my parents and school (of whom 98% of the student body go on to college) that I don't want to go to college, but that I just want God more. What do you think?

I really do love getting a question like this one. That may sound weird (but from me would expect anything else), yet I really do love the idea that there

are still young people, and in fact, more and more young people today who are choosing to think what God wants for them before what the world maybe asking of them. Now will that lessen the confusion of how to deal with it...no...but it sure makes a lot of people like me real proud of you!

In regards to a vocation to the religious life, if you feel certain of the call and feel the pull of God's giant magnet, don't resist it. Explore all of your options and educate yourself on your possibilities. Make a vocational retreat. I recently learned about this person who felt he was being called to the priesthood, but he had already gone through Law School, became a lawyer and was making a 6-figure salary. Still he couldn't get away from the feeling that God wanted more from him in his life. Even though family and friends told him those feelings would pass away, "Its just a phase." Still he believed he needed to explore everything there is to know becoming a priest, to find if God was truly calling him and in the end he listened and followed the call...he will be ordained a priest next summer. This man is an uncle of one of the teens in my parish and the pride that this young man had in telling me the story was profound, and as profound as what God wants to do in you. The young man told me that his uncle's journey to the priesthood has given him a couple of insights as to responding to God's call and acting upon it.

"First don't "play games" or lie to your parents and friends. If you feel the call nothing can get in the way of that invitation. Also, don't feel obligated to 'explain' to your friends your choice. If they disapprove or become hostile, they really aren't being friends that you need them to be. Ask them to accept your decision, and tell them how important it is to you. But most importantly, get to know what you want to get into. That's first on your list."

I thought those were great insights and wanted to share them with you. What I would add to that is this...pray (a lot), talk to nuns that you may know (get to understand their stories of how they came to the religious life), and talk to your parents (I remember when I first told my mother that I

wanted to be a priest, she thought I was joking, but when she realized I was serious...she has been my biggest supporter ever since.)

I hope this helps and know that you are in my prayers...by the way, check out Matthew 19:29-30...I think you may like the insight it offers.

115. What can I say to comfort someone whose 17 year old daughter just passed away?

One of my favorite rituals in the whole Catholic funeral celebration is the praying of the Rosary the evening before the funeral Mass. The beginning of the Rosary is the most profound moment as we pray the three “Hail Mary’s.” It is these three prayers that we always find comfort in: in **faith**, **hope**, and **love**.

The first “Hail Mary” is for an increase of **Faith**. We have faith that this child of God is now resting in His hands, not fading away into nothingness. As we hear in the funeral Mass, “life is not ended, when the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.” Mary knew this kind of faith when she held her son at his death. And so as we pray the Rosary and come to those moments when we begin to question the salvation of a child, or anyone else we may love...just place them in the arms of our blessed mother. Let Mary be her mother too.

The second “Hail Mary” is a prayer for **Hope**. There is always hope. Hope will fill every moment with the joy and expectation of sharing life with those we love. Each day will bring brighter chances to let this child of God shine through your heart. So put away any doubts and fears. Pray for each other and for those who have passed on to glory before us, and each time give them to God. Trust in God’s mercy and know that He loves all of His children.

The third “Hail Mary” is for an increase in **Love**. As Christians, love is a sign of the goodness and beauty in this life. Where there is love, there is

God. The only permanent thing we have in this world is the love we share with one another. When friends die, we find ourselves drifting into how we didn't love them perfectly. But know that they love you and God will always love you. This is a love that brings people together and calls them to each other's side to comfort and care.

Don't ever let anyone feel that they must grieve alone. That is when the family and friends should gather to share stories. There will be tears and laughter. It may feel strange to laugh or smile at those times, but no one should just sit in the pain. We celebrate eternal life, not just the life we shared on this earth.

Pray with each other and know that others are praying with you, like me and all those who will read this. And no one is ever truly lost as long as we remember.

116. I want to be a nun, go to Yale, and join the Peace Corp, but I've not even graduated from high school. When should I do all of this? I am also afraid to tell my parents.

Well, in answer to the first part of your question, I think you could fit it all in the two weeks of graduating high school and the first session of classes at Yale. I mean, it's not like you're biting off huge things here, lifelong commitments, attending a major ivy league university, or trying to join an organization that wants to change the world or anything it's simple.

Honestly, though, those are really great aspirations to try and live out. If you accomplish any one of those, you should be proud of yourself and what you have allowed God to work through you. I would bring all of that to prayer and really see where God is leading you because the reality is that any one of those is a huge challenge and commitment that you cannot enter into half-heartedly or try to get done while thinking about the next thing that's coming around.

As far as when to tell your parents about your desire to possibly pursue religious life, I've found that the sooner is better than later. And if your experience turns out anywhere close to mine, when I told my family about wanting to become a Priest, there is going to be a little laughing, a little crying, a lot of discussion and, ultimately, a great show of love from your parents for your life. In all of these things that you are thinking about doing, just be open to what God wants you to do.

117.

118. I always see a lot of poor people asking for change. As a Catholic Christian, do I have an obligation to give them money?

The scriptures are filled with references to helping the poor and needy. The most famous obviously is the passage in the 10th chapter in the Gospel of Luke Verses 25-37, which is the parable of the "Good Samaritan." And like the parable illustrates, we are called to be observant to the needs of our brothers and sisters who are less fortunate than ourselves.

So, is it an obligation? I would say, no, it is not an obligation; it is part of our Christian calling. As Christian we are called to be Christ to those who are in need either financially or spiritually. Having said that though, we also have to be prudent with our resources. You shouldn't be going around giving 500 or 600 dollars to somebody standing on the side of the road, or buying them a month's worth of rent at the Embassy Suites. Part of our obligation is, also, being good stewards of our resources. What that means is there are times when we either have to show somebody how to help themselves or through prayers and judgment realize who has the greatest needs.

Whenever I find myself walking down the street and there is somebody begging on the side of the road, I have no problem giving them a buck or

two. And realizing that that might not meet all their needs, but there might be someone who is more needy around the corner, and I have to be willing to help them as well. I also think that just from a practical standpoint; you need to be real careful about how you approach someone on the street. This day in age, you have to be very aware of your circumstances and surroundings and don't get yourself into a position where you are going to be hurt, or even robbed. Your intentions are good. Your instincts of faith are correct. And I'm happy to hear that you are noticing the poor and feeling in need to help them.

119. What should I do when my friend makes fun of Catholics?

Stick out your tongue and stomp your foot then turn and tell them that your daddy can beat up their daddy!

Well, it always worked for me in Kindergarten! But maybe you're right, there's gotta be a better way than that. So let's take a look at some different ways to handle this, shall we.

There's really two ways to respond to this situation, and it totally depends on your friend. Most of the time, when people make fun of Catholicism, it's because they don't understand it. Sometimes, it's that person's way of reaching out and wanting to know more... really, I'm not kidding; it's kinda funky how people work sometimes. If your friend is willing to listen, explain stuff to them. Whenever they start ragging on the Church, just say, "Hey, you know, it's actually kinda cool why we do that. You see, we do it because..." and teach them something. Maybe take them to a Bible study or something with your Youth Group and let them get to know more about what Catholicism is really about and how we as Catholics do cool stuff too. If they understand it, they're more likely to stop making fun of it.

The other kind of thing that is happening when people crack on Catholicism is because they feel a duty to “save you.” These people tend not to want to get into any real debate and usually don’t want to listen, so there’s not much you can do to show them any other view of what we believe. In these cases, just tell them you don’t like it when they make fun of something that really is a big part of your life, and leave it at that. If they continue to make fun of Catholics, just walk away and maybe rethink the need to have their friendship in your life. I don’t know many people who like to be around people who make fun of the most important part of their lives. And nobody should ever have to put up with it anyway.

I know it can be tough sometimes, but just stick with your faith, and don’t back down. Maybe think about offering up a Mass for your friend every once in a while (that would probably drive’em nuts if they ever found out about).

120. Fr. John, I am sexually frustrated. I am a good kid, but I have to release this. Isn't it better to use porn than to bring some one else into my sin?

I’m just going to cut to my final answer, and then go back and fill in why.

NO. It is never good to get involved with pornography...ever.

To use pornography so not to “bring someone else into my sin”—that is an excuse and bad one at that! It’s like saying,

“The Bible tells us that we should never lust (check out Matthew 5:27-28), but I do that all the time. So why should I even bother trying?”

We keep on trying because we are not asked to be perfect, but to keep on trying to get better, “All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).”

Pornography is a gross world that no soul should ever have to set foot in.

If you fall into the trap of pornography, all sort of awful things sneak into your life. To begin with, you’ll be consumed with going back to your room so that you can escape into that fantasy world you’ve created with those Internet babes. For some people this dangerous sexual fantasy stuff can get real out of control, and make it difficult to form *real* intimate relationships with anyone. You’ll start to notice that you see people differently. They become objects that you lust after, rather than children of God that you should love in His name. Your personal sin always brings in others.

Never try to convince yourself that there is a “safer” sin. All sin “wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity (CCC paragraph 1849). Be stronger than your lust, and remember what St. Paul wrote, “Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Whenever we sin we create our hearts an excuse to sin again. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that sin ‘engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good

and evil.” (Paragraph 1865) This means that the more you sin, the more likely you are going to revisit those sins. Avoid sin.

Living the life of a celibate Priest as I do, I know how difficult it can be to keep sexual urges under control. They’re part of our biological makeup. Our sexuality is one of the great gifts God gave us and we need to grow more in tune with the way God intended us to use that gift. Sexuality wasn’t given to you so that when ever you’re feeling “frustrated” you go off to your room, click on your favorite porn sit and get your jollies. And I don’t believe for a second that anyone has ever died from not having sex...I mean I’ve been alive for almost 37 years and I haven’t exploded yet! Chastity is not easy, but it is necessary.

Okay, I think I’m done with the lecture part of this...now let me offer some suggestions on the practical level that may help you:

121.

122. I would like to know what makes something infallible.

The teaching on the infallibility of the Pope did not take place until the reign of Pope Pius IX, when he called the First Vatican Council, on December 8, 1869. And so, anything that would be called by the term infallible would have to come after that Council. And since Pope St. Pius X died in 1565, I’m thinking he’s about 300+ years off. And as important as any document is that has ever been that has been written by one of our Pontiffs “Quo Primum” does not qualify to be called infallible.

So what does make infallibility well I happen to have my handy dandy Catechism of the Universal Church sittin right here. So how bout I round ya up a lil' answer.

All right pardner, if you turn to the ole' Catechism you're gonna read the following...

“The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in the virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful – who confirms his brethren the faith- he proclaims by definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals... infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops, when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium,” above all in the Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine ‘for belief as being divinely revealed,’ and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions ‘must be adhered to with the obedience of faith.’ This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself.” (check out CCC 890-892)

So you can see that it takes some very special circumstances for something to be pronounced infallible. In fact, it's so special that there have only been three infallible statements ever made.

1. The Doctrine of Papal Infallability
2. The Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception
3. The Doctrine on the Assumption of Mary.

Now having said all this “Keymosabee”, I don't want anyone to go away with the impression that makes everything else that Pope may say or a council may decree is up for grabs. Although there are some papal documents and council teachings that no longer speak to us this day in age, they did have a purpose and a meaning to the people who they were written for, and we need to respect that. And that even though present day Papal decrees, letters and

so fourth might not be infallible, they are still inspired, and the Holy Father is still Christ's advocate on Earth (as well as just being the most holy and intelligent dude you'd even wanna meet). And so we need to listen and allow ourselves to have the humility to be taught throughout our lives and throughout the life of the Catholic Church.

123. Can you offer more insight on the Our Father? Like what each part means?

“Our Father which art in Heaven.”

He is our Father. There is nothing real in us which does not come from his. WE belong to him. He loves us, since he loves himself and we are his. Nevertheless he is our Father who is in heaven-not elsewhere. If we think to have a Father here below it is not he, it is a false God. We cannot take a single step toward him. We do not walk vertically. We can only turn our eyes toward him. We do not have to search for him, we only have to change the direction in which we are looking. It is for him to search for us. We much be happy in the knowledge that he is infinitely beyond our reach. This we can be certain that the veil in us, even if it overwhelms our whole being, in no way sullies the divine purity, bliss, and perfection.

“Hallowed be thy Name”

God alone has the power to name himself. His name is unpronounceable for human lips. His name is his word. It is the Word of God. Thy name of any being is an intermediary between human spirit and that being; it is the only means by which the

human spirit can conceive something about a being that is absent. God is absent. He is in heaven. Man's only possibility of gaining access to him is through his name. It is the Mediator. Man has access to this name, although it also is transcendent. It shines in the beauty and order of the world and it shines in the interior light of the human soul. This name is holiness itself; there is not holiness outside it; it does not therefore have to be hallowed. In asking for its hallowing we are asking for something that exists eternally, with full and complete reality, so that we can neither increase nor diminish it, even an infinitesimal fraction. To ask for that which exists, that which exists really, infallibly, eternally, quite independently of our prayer, that is the perfect petition. We cannot prevent ourselves from desiring, we are made of desire, but the desire that nails us down to what is imaginary, temporal, selfish, can, if we make it pass wholly into this petition, become a lever to tear us from the imaginary into the real and from time into eternity, to life is right out of the prison of self.

“Thy Kingdom Come.”

This concerns something to be achieved, something not yet here. The kingdom of God means the complete filling of the entire soul of intelligent creatures with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit bloweth where he listeth? We can only invite him. We must not even try to invite him in a definite and special way to visit us or anyone else in particular, or even everybody in general; we must just invite him purely and simply, so that our thought of him is an invitation, a longing cry. It is as when one is in extreme thirst, ill with thirst, the one no longer think of the act of drinking in a general way. One merely thinks of water, actually water itself, but the image of water is like a cry from our whole being.

“Thy will be done.”

We are absolutely, infallibly certain if the will of God concerning the past. Everything that has happened, whatever it may be, is in accordance with the will of the almighty Father. This is implied by the notion of the almighty power. The future also, whatever it may contain, once it has come about, will have come about in the conformity with the will of God. We can neither add nor take from this conformity. In this clause, therefore, after an up surging of our desire toward the possible, we are once again asking for that which is. Here, however, we are not concerned with an eternal reality such as the holiness of the Word, but with what happens in the time order. Nevertheless we are asking for the infallible and eternal conformity of everything in time with the will of God. After having, in our first petition, torn our desire away from time in order to fix it upon eternity, thereby transforming it, we return to this desire which has itself become in some measure eternal, in order to apply it once more to time. Whereupon our desire pierces through time to find eternity behind it. That is what comes about when we know how to make every accomplished fact, whatever it may be, an object of desire. We have here quite a different thing from resignation. Even the word acceptance is too weak. We have to desire that everything that has happened should have happened, and nothing else. We have to do so, not because God has permitted it, and because the obedience of the course of events to God is in itself an absolute good.

“On earth as it is in heaven.”

The association of our desire with the almighty will of God should be extended to spiritual things. Our own spiritual ascents and falls, and those of the beings we love, have to do with the other world, but they are also events that take place here below, in time. On that account they are details in the immense sea of events and are tossed about with the ocean in a way conforming to the will of God. Since our failures of the past have come about, we have to desire into the future, for the day when it will have become past. It

is necessary correction of the petition that the kingdom of God should come. We have to cast aside all other desires for the sake of our desire for eternal life, but we should desire eternal life itself with renunciation. We must not even become attached to detachment. Attachment to salvation is even more dangerous than the others. We have to think of eternal life as one thinks of water when dying of thirst, and yet at the same time we have to desire what we and our loved ones should be eternally deprived of this water rather than receive it in abundance in spite of God's will, if such a thing were conceivable.

The three forgoing petitions are related to the three Persons of the Trinity, the Son, the Spirit, and the Father, and also to the three divisions of time, the present, the future, and the past. The three petitions that follow have more direct bearing on the three divisions of time, and take them in a different order- present, past, and future.

“Give us this day our daily bread” – the bread which is supernatural*

Christ is our bread. We can only ask to have him now. Actually he is always there at the door of our souls, wanting to enter in, though he does not force our consent. If we agree to his entry, he enters; directly we cease to want him, he is gone. We cannot bind out will today for tomorrow; we cannot make a past with him that tomorrow he will be within us, even in spite of ourselves. Our consent to his presence is the same as his presence. Consent is an act; it can only be actual, that is to say in the present. We have not been given a will that can be applied to the future. Everything not effective in our will is imaginary. The effective part of the will has its effect at once; its effectiveness cannot be separated from itself. The effective part of the will is not effort, which is directed toward the future. It is consent; it is the “yes” of marriage. A “yes” pronounced within the present moment and for the present

moment, but spoken as an eternal word, for it is consent to the union of Christ with the eternal past of our soul.

Bread is a necessity for us. We are beings who continually draw our energy from outside, for as we receive it we become feeble and incapable of movement. Besides actual food, in the literal sense of the word, all incentives are sources of energy for us. Money, ambition, consideration, decorations, celebrity, power, our loved ones, everything that puts into us the capacity for action is like bread. If anyone of these attachments penetrates deeply enough into us to reach the vital roots of our carnal existence, its loss may break us and even cause our death. This is called dying of love. It is like dying of hunger. All these objects of attachment go together with food, in the ordinary sense of the word, to make up the gaily bread of this world. It depends entirely on circumstances whether we have it or not. We should ask nothing with regard to circumstances unless it be that they may confirm to the will of God. We should not ask for earthly bread.

There is a transcendent energy whose source is in heaven, and flows into us as soon as we wish for it. It is real energy; it performs actions through the agency of our souls and of our bodies.

We should ask for this food. At the moment of asking and by the very fact that we ask for it, we know that God will give it to us. We ought not to be able to bear to go without it for a single day, for when our actions only depend on the earthly energies, subject to the necessity of this world, we are incapable of thinking and doing anything but evil. God saw “that misdeeds of man were multiplied on the earth and that all the thoughts of his heart were continually bent upon evil.” The necessity that drives us toward evil governs everything in us except the energy from on high at the moment when it comes into us. We cannot store it.

“And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors”

At the moment of saying these words we must have already remitted everything that we owe to us. This not only includes reparation for any wrongs we think we have suffered, but also gratitude for the good we think we have done, and it applies in a quite general way to all we expect from people and things, to all we consider as our due and without which we should feel ourselves to have been frustrated. All these are the rights that we think the past has given us over the future. First there is the right to a certain permanence. When we have enjoyed something for a long time, we think that it is ours and that we are entitled to expect fate to let us go on enjoying it. Then there is the right to a compensation for every effort whatever its nature, be it work, suffering, or desire. Every time that we put forth some effort and the equivalent of this effort does not come back to us in the form of some visible fruit, we have a sense of false balance and emptiness which makes us think that we have been cheated. The effort of suffering from some offense causes us to expect the punishment or apologies of the offender, the effort of doing good makes us expect the gratitude of the person we have helped, but these are only particular cases of a universal law of the soul. Every time we give anything out we have an absolute need that at least the equivalents should come into us, and because we need this we think we have a right to it. Our debtors comprise all beings and all things; they are the entire universe. We think we have claims everywhere. In every claim we think we possess there is always the idea of an imaginary claim of the past on the future. That is the claim we have to renounce.

To have forgiven our debtors is to have renounced the whole of the past in a lump. It is to accept that the future should still be virgin and intact, strictly united to the past by bonds of which we are ignorant, but quite free from the bonds our imagination thought to impose upon it. It means that we accept the possibility that this will happen, and that it may happen to us in particular; it means

that we accept the possibility that this will happen, and that it may happen to us in particular; it means that we are prepared for the future to render all our past life sterile and vain.

In renouncing at one stroke all the fruits of the past without exception, we ask of God that our past sins may not bear their miserable fruits of evil and error. So long as we cling to the past, God himself cannot stop this horrible fruiting. We cannot hold on to the past without retaining our crimes, for we are unaware of what is most essentially bad in us.

The principal claim we think we have on the universe is that our personality should continue. This claim implies all the others. The instinct of self-preservation makes us feel this continuation to be a necessity, and we believe that a necessity is a right. We are like the beggar who said to Talleyrand: "Sir, I must live," and to whom the Talleyrand replied, "I do not see the necessity for that." Our personality is entirely dependent on external circumstances which have unlimited power to crush it. But we would rather die than admit this. From our point of view the equilibrium of the world is a combination of circumstances so ordered that our personality remains intact and seems to belong to us. All the circumstances of the past that have wounded our personality appear to us to be disturbances of balance which should infallibly be made up for one day or another by phenomena of the compensations. The near approach of death is horrible chiefly because it forces the knowledge upon us that these compensations will never come.

To remit debts is to renounce our own personality. It means renouncing everything that goes to make up our ego, without and exception. It means knowing that in the ego there is nothing whatever, no psychological element, that external circumstances could not do away with. It means accepting that truth. It means being happy that things should be so.

The words “Thy will be done” imply this acceptance, if we say them with all our soul. That is why we can say a few moments later: “We forgive our debtors.”

The forgiveness of debts is spiritual poverty, spiritual nakedness, death. If we accept death completely, we can ask God to make us live again, purified from the evil in us. For to ask him to forgive us our debts is to ask him to wipe away the evil in us. Pardon is purification. God himself has not only the power to forgive the evil in us while it remains there. God will have forgiven our debts when he has brought us to the state of perfection.

Until the God forgives our debts partially in the same measure as we forgive our debtors.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

The only temptation for man is to be abandoned to his own resources in the presence of evil. His nothingness is then proved experimentally. Although the soul has received supernatural bread at the moment when it is asked for it, its joy is mixed with fear in the form of a supplication. It finishes with that. The prayer began with the word “father,” and ends with the word “evil.” We must go from confidence to fear. Confidence alone can give us strength enough not to fall as a result of fear. After having contemplated the name, the supernatural bread and having been purified from evil, the soul is ready for that true humility which crowns all virtues. Humility consists of knowing that in this world the whole soul, not only what we term the ego in its totality, but also the supernatural part of the soul, which is God present in it, is subject to time and to the vicissitudes of change. There must be absolute acceptance of the possibility that everything natural in us should be destroyed. But we must simultaneously accept and repudiate the possibility that the supernatural part of the soul should disappear. It must be accepted as an event that would come about only in

conformity with the will of God. It must be repudiated as being something utterly horrible. We must be afraid of it, but our fear must be as it were the completion of confidence.

The six petitions correspond with each other on pairs. The bread which is transcendent is the same thing as the divine name. It is what beings about the contact of man with God. The kingdom of God is the same thing as his protection stretched over us against temptation; to protect is the function of royalty. Forgiving our debtors their debts is the same thing as the total acceptance of the will of God. The difference is that in the first three petitions the attention is fixed solely on God. In the last three, we turn our attention back to ourselves in order to compel ourselves to make these petitions a real and not an imaginary act.

In the first half of the prayer, we begin with acceptance. Then we allow ourselves a desire. Then we correct it by coming back to acceptance. In the second half, the order is changed; we finish by expressing desire. Only desire has now become negative; it is expressed as a fear; therefore it corresponds to the highest degree of humility and that is a fitting way to end.

The Our Father contains all possible petitions; we cannot conceive of any prayer not already contained in it. It is to prayer what Christ is to humanity. It is impossible to say it once through, giving the fullest possible attention to each word, without a change, infinitesimal perhaps but real, taking place in the soul.

124.

125. Would it be wrong to give up talking for Lent?

Well that's interesting! No, I'm pretty sure it wouldn't be wrong, but I'm pretty sure it'll be quiet around your house.

Lent isn't about going to extremes. It's about finding balance. If you give up something that is essential to communication and society, that's an extreme. Find a balance. Maybe give up talking to the phone. Maybe give up going to chat rooms, unless of course they're Lifeteen.com. Maybe give up some aspect of every day talking, but don't give up everything about talking. Find that balance. Find a way to make your speech holy. So that ultimately maybe by the end of Lent, every time you talk people will hear the holiness of Christ comes out of you.

126. So what's the deal with all this creation stuff? I mean, how do we know anything we hear in the bible is true? I mean like scientists are all saying that it's wrong. So how did it all start?

When you look at this ongoing debate it seems to go in cycles every few years or so about whether or not the creationists are right or the evolutionists are right. You just have to come to the conclusion that the answer is "yes" they are. And then as you begin to look at yourself with that weird sort of look you get when you heard somebody answer your question, but you're not quite sure if they really did answer the question you asked or if they decided to answer the special question they've been keeping safe in their own mind and have chosen now to share it. And then you scratch your head and say "It's so obvious, it was yes! How could I have been so dumb? It was right there in front of me the whole time! Of course it was yes and what has been there in front of me the whole time." So the answer is "yes" to a certain extent for those who only believe in creation taking place just as it is presented in Genesis are right! And to a certain extent those who say that creation began with a big bang and we have evolved into

what we are today are right. But neither position is totally right. Like so many things, the answer is actually somewhere in the middle.

Let's look at Genesis first. I think one of the difficulties in looking at the creation story in Genesis has always been that we just look at the story. We don't look beyond what is being said. One of the things that we teach in scripture is that interpreting the sacred word of God is both simple and profound. What I mean by that, the simple truth is God did create everything. You can't get around it, and anyone who argues any differently is just plain wrong. God is before all else that is and has made everything that has come into being (**check out the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #317, *"God alone created the universe freely, directly, and without any help."***). It's also profound. Because if we just looked at it and said "Well, God did all the work in 6 days! That's kinda cool! Then He took a break! That's great!", then we would be missing out on what the Word of God is telling us. Think of the book of Genesis like a catechism, a very early way of handing the truths of faith. So what does the first question that is usually asked? "Who made us?" **(If at this point you're saying to yourself, where did this idea come from? Well, it came from a wonderful little book I like to call the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #282, *"Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times asked themselves: "Where do we come from?" "Where are we going?" "What is our origin?" "What is our end?" "Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?" The two questions, the first about origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions."*)**

The first Creation account in Genesis is all about who made us, and it's remarkable because everyone else at that time, if you look at any of the mythologies, didn't answer the question the same way. When the Greeks asked the question "Who made us?" The answer was, "During a time of war between gods and titans all things were made." When you asked the Romans, the answer was the same (mainly because they just ripped off the Greeks and didn't have time to create their own myths!). When you look at the Norse or the Egyptians or the Syrians or pretty much anybody else, when they ask the question "who made us?" The answer is a bunch of gods who end up creating the earth out of some by-product of a war. And most of them don't really care about the people. People are just there so that they can play with them. Not with the true God. When asked the question, "Who made us?" The one true God says "I made you because I love you. I made you to be good and it is good." The second question we ask is, "Why are we the way that we are?" That's answered in the second Creation account (if I'm freaking you out here, remember there are two Creation stories. The first Creation account is in chapter one and another in chapter two. (Go ahead; open up Genesis. I'm not making this up.) The second Creation account is where we hear about Eden, and Adam and Eve and original sin. And so we ask the question, "Why are we the way that we are?" And it's all because we couldn't accept the gift; we thought there had to be more. And instead of finding more, we found sin. Yet that's not a bad thing. I mean sin is a bad thing, yes, but original sin leads to redeeming grace. Remember what we just sang at the Easter Vigil, "O, Happy Fault! O, necessary sin of Adam!" (**Time for a quick Catechism break, #407, "The doctrine of original sin, closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, provides lucid discernment of man's situation and activity in the world."**) This means if there wasn't original sin there would never have been a need for the incarnation.

The thing you can't do with Genesis is treat it like a text book or a science project. It wasn't meant for that...ever. So when we talk about things like evolution, you're not ever going to find that in the Bible because it has nothing to do with God's redeeming work or has inspired word to his people. The only thing we need to remember is what the Church teaches in this regard, evolution exists, and we see it in nature and in the process of natural history. We don't deny that evolution takes place. **(As is seen in that most favorite of books... the CCC, #302, "*Creations has its own goodness and proper perfection, but it did not spring forth complete form the hands of the Creator. The universe was created "in a state of journeying" (in statu viae) toward an ultimate perfection yet to be attained, to which God has destined it. We call "divine providence" the dispositions by which God guides his creation toward this perfection.*")** The only point that we would argue is reducing humanity to becoming an animal. We were always human. "Male and female, he created them. In the divine image, he created them." To say that we were anything less than human, is to deny the divine image. What does this divine image mean? It's not anything physical in the sense of how we look. That means that early humans were probably as hairy as all get out, in some cases shorter and some cases taller and some cases with bigger foreheads or longer arms and everything else you can imagine when you think of a caveman, but what it doesn't mean is that we were an ape. **(Once again I direct your attention to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #41, "*All creatures bear a certain resemblance to God, most especially man, created in the image and likeness of God. The manifold perfections of creatures- their truth, their goodness, their beauty- all reflect the infinite perfection of God. Consequently we can name God by taking his creatures' perfections as our starting point, 'for from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.'*")**

The problem with using Genesis as a science book is that it mixes up your head. You begin to think that you have to choose one or the other. “If there was a big bang, then we don’t need God.” Well, no. If there was a big bang, we still need someone to start it. And whatever name you want to give that starting point, ultimately it’s God. Then you can say, “Well if the big bang was the start of everything, what started God?” Alright, let me just answer this one straight out. There’s no such thing as a stupid question, but that one comes really close. By the very definition of what God is, it means he can’t have a beginning or an end, he can’t have a limit. He can’t have any of the failings or the weaknesses that we would place on him, because if he did he wouldn’t be God. Remember what St. Anselm of Canterbury once said, “Whatever the human mind can conceive of God, that is not God in his fullness.” What that’s saying very politely is, whatever we, or any scientist or anyone else would want to try to define God, can’t do it. He’s bigger than we are.

My hope, is that we use the scriptures for what they’re intended, to teach us how to live. How to live with each other and how to live for God and that we would stop trying to make up other reasons for the Bible. Whether that’s finding secret passages that tells about the future or finding a sequence of verses that tell of hidden meanings for our present times. Because that’s just us as human beings trying to do the same thing Adam and Eve did at the very beginning, trying to out think God. And that’s just not going happen. Always keep in mind what our Holy Father once said, *“some would have it that only that is true which can be verified by reason and science; yet prayer is a mystery that overflows both our conscious and unconscious lives.”* (**Address to the Third General Assembly of Latin American Bishops**)

So, the next time you get the chance open up Genesis and really listen to how much God loves you

127.

128.

129. What is Grace?

Grace is an interesting lady who lives down my street who sits outside in her lawn chair all day long, eating strawberries and oranges from a fruit basket, and whistling show tunes to no one in particular.

Ok, now here is what Grace really is... Grace is what makes us holy. Grace is the power of God in our lives to help us do the things we could never do on our own. We can attain Grace and we do attain Grace when we receive our sacraments (a sacrament is an outward sign of an inward Grace, instituted by Christ for the salvation of souls – this is the official Church teaching). Grace can also be gained through acts of charity and obedience to God's will in our daily lives. So all in all, Grace is something we really want to have in our lives, and God in His goodness has given us plenty of chances to get our share.