

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In last week's pastor's letter, I wrote about the five precepts of the church, and how they are universally binding upon all the Catholic faithful. These precepts specify the indispensable minimum moral and ecclesiastical duties that are expected of all Catholics. This week I want to briefly comment on how we are to fulfill each of these precepts.

1. attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation and refrain from work and activities which could impede the sanctification of those days.

Every Catholic is obligated to participate in the celebration of the Holy Mass when the church gathers together on Sundays and on Holy Days of obligation. Very simply, go to one of the Masses offered on weekends, either the anticipated Mass Saturday evening or any of the Masses on Sunday, as well as a Mass on Holy Days, and observe all those days by refraining from servile work in order to pray, rest and have recreation with family and friends.

2. confess one's sins, receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once each year.

At a bare minimum, go to confession once a year, simple as that. However, every Catholic must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation whenever a mortal sin has been committed, and must normally refrain from receiving Holy Communion until that has been done. A good rule of thumb that I recommend to all people is to go to confession once a month, and as otherwise needed.

3. receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.

This is called "doing one's Easter duty." Although any Catholic who seriously wishes to grow in the spiritual life and in sanctification should want to receive Holy Communion worthily as often as possible, every Sunday - or even daily - if they are in a state of grace.

4. abstain from eating meat, and observe the days of fasting, as established by the Church.

The USCCB has mandated that "Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are obligatory days of fasting and abstinence (from meat) for Catholics. In addition, Fridays during Lent are obligatory days of abstinence. The norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59," unless some infirmity prevents one from doing so. "When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal. The norms concerning abstinence are binding upon members of the Latin Catholic Church from age 14 onwards."

5. help to provide for the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.

We are all called to give generously and sacrificially of our time, talents - and yes, our money - to support the work of the Church. A tithe, or 10 percent, has been the traditional standard from Old Testament times. For the poor, 10 percent might be a great deal, while 10 percent for the wealthy might mean very little. So, put God first and give proportionately, sacrificially and generously according to the degree to which you have been blessed with this world's goods.

These five precepts of the Church help us to align our spiritual lives according to God's will. They are the minimal prerequisites for practicing the Catholic faith. Let us each seek God's grace to fulfill these precepts and to grow in holiness of life so that one day we may hear God say to us: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21).

Fr. Richard Ballard
Parochial Vicar