Class Q&A , June/July 2018

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**(1) “How do I pray?” “How do I pray for other people?”**

I wrote a short blog post last year for a friend with some questions about prayer. Here is the link as I think this may help answer some aspects of this question:

<http://www.pillarandfoundation.com/evangelization-corner-what-is-prayer-and-what-is-its-purpose/>

I also created a short video on prayer that may also be helpful. You can find the video at this link:

<http://www.pillarandfoundation.com/catholic-videos/>

**(2) “Do Catholics pray differently than Protestants?”**

In some sense no and in another sense yes.

(a) If you read the above article and watch the above video, I think that all Christians will agree overall with what I am discussing and how I am defining prayer. So in the general sense of what pray is and why would should pray there are more similarities than differences.

As to differences though, I have been told by some non-Catholic Christians (though this will not apply to all non-Catholics) that they have never considered that a part of our prayer life is to develop a relationship not only with Jesus but also with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. It is true Jesus is our only mediator and so we have access to God through Jesus Christ and we pray to God only “in the name” of Jesus. But in prayer we are to grow in our relationship with all three Divine Persons - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Additionally, God the Holy Spirit assists us in our prayers and is at work in us drawing us closer to God.

(Read Catechism #2663-2672; 2777-2802)

[We see an example of how to pray in the Lord’s Prayer Christ taught us as he tells us to invoke God Our Father directly but we also see throughout many of St. Paul’s letters in the Bible how he shows us how to invoke all three persons of the Trinity in prayer. (And the Catholic prayer the “Glory Be” is similar to what Paul often does; this prayer says: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.)]

(b) As Catholics, we also ask those who are in heaven (the Saints) to pray for us. This is called intercessory prayer (where we ask another to intercede to God for us). Intercessory prayer is something we do each time we ask our friends or family here on earth to pray for us but, as Catholics, we see that those who are now in heaven are still members of our Church family and they can still pray for us as well. This is a practice done by some but not all non-Catholic Christians. Why we do this and evidence in the Bible for doing this will be introduced in the last Symbolon class but you can also read this article I wrote on this topic:

<http://www.catholicstand.com/the-prayers-of-the-saints/>

(c) Catholics do have some formulaic prayers and, though this is not the only way to pray, many often ask me what are some of the common Catholic prayers so here is one list:

<https://www.catholic.com/tract/common-catholic-prayers>

**(3) “Why do Catholics use prayer candles and does this ensure my prayers are heard?”**

Prayer candles are in no way a necessity when you pray but if these candles are used in prayer it is because they are a beautiful symbol. The light of the candle represents Christ our light. Regardless of what is happening in our life, the candle reminds us Christ is always present and he is the light in this world of darkness. Because this light came into the world 2000 years ago, everything changed (John 1). Humanity was redeemed. Heaven was made possible for all. Peace, joy and life are now offered to us in Christ. The stillness our hearts long for can now be found in Christ – as St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless O Lord until they rest in you.” All of these realities can be symbolized by the light of a candle.

The prayer candle is not required in order for God to hear our prayers. God always hears are prayers (1 John 5:14-15). And as Jesus tells us, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Luke 11:9-13).

**(4) “Why do Catholics have crucifixes?” “Why do Catholics still depict Jesus as nailed on the cross even though he is no longer on it?”**

Here is an article I wrote on this question:

<http://www.catholicstand.com/stumbling-block-crucifix/>

**(5) “For a new Catholic, is it better to start by reading the New Testament or Old Testament (especially if you have no experience reading the Bible)?”**

It is probably best to start by reading the four Gospels which tell us of the life of Christ. Then you can continue reading the other New Testament books next. Then you can work your way through the Old Testament (but as you do so, keep in mind that it is not necessary to read the Old Testament books in the order you find them as some are chronological but not all).

I would strongly encourage having a good Catholic commentary to assist you as you read. There is a large series called the *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* which is very good. Or you can buy a Bible that has extensive footnotes such as the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible* (only the New Testament is available in one volume but they are now publishing individual Old Testament books so look for those). There is also now *The Didache Bible with Commentary from the Catechism* by Ignatius that I am hearing good things about.

Search on FORMED for different talks based on the Bible and Scripture and these can help as well.

The Great Adventure Bible Study is a great resource but it does cost money and many people do these more in groups but individuals can purchase the studies ( <https://biblestudyforcatholics.com/> ).

Also, much of the year at the Cathedral in Tyler there is a Bible study on Tuesday evenings (and many Catholic parishes have bible studies as well so you can call around to parishes to see what they are offering).

**(6) “Why are Catholics called ‘Catholic’ and not just ‘Christian’?”**

The world ‘catholic’ means ‘universal.’ The Church established by Jesus Christ can be simply called “the Church,” however, as we have discussed several times in class, heresies (those who rejected the teachings handed down from Christ to the Apostles) arose from the very beginning. We can see the early Apostles debating these groups in the New Testament, then in the writings of the Early Church Fathers and this continues today.

Many of these heretical groups claimed they had the fullness of truth and that their interpretations or knowledge was what was to be believed. As you traveled throughout the Roman Empire in the first and second centuries, different communities would be dealing with different heretical groups. Because of this, Bishop Ignatius of Antioch was writing to Christians before he was martyred and he had to address this reality. He ultimately told the Christians:

“See that you all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is administered either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude of the people also be; even as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the **Catholic Church**.” (Letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ch 8)

This letter was written around 107AD and it is the first documentation we have of the Church being described as “the catholic Church.” The term ‘catholic’ is being used as an adjective to emphasize the universality. Bishop Ignatius is saying that these heretical groups are often localized or if you find them in various places they do not always agree with each other. There is only one Church that has the same faith being taught everywhere by all of her leaders (the bishops). It is this same Church whose bishops are handing down the faith they received from Jesus Christ through the Apostles. Interestingly, in this letter, Bishop Ignatius also uses this term as if it is a term already well-known by his readers as he does not go into detail in explaining what the term means or why he uses it. So it is likely this was already in use prior to use writing this in 107AD.

Throughout the centuries, at times the Church may refer to herself as the “Catholic Church” to distinguish herself from heretics but the Church saw herself as being the only true Church established by Jesus Christ and her members were Christians who held to the one faith taught always and everywhere by this Church. After the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, though, it became common for some Protestants to begin to refer to members of the Catholic Church as either “Roman Catholics” or “papists” to imply the Protestant rejection of the papacy (the bishop of Rome) and to emphasize a distinction between themselves (Protestants) and Catholics. In time, it even becomes a trend for some Protestants (though not all) to accuse Catholics of not even being “Christians” but this is untrue. Catholics are Christians and, looking at the history of Christianity, the Church - that was called “Catholic” as early as 107AD - is the same Church founded by Christ and whose leaders were the Apostles and their successors (the bishops). Today, you will find it common even among those in the Church to now refer to themselves as Catholics. This assumes the acknowledgement that we are Christians, but this term also distinguishes us from the denominations within Christianity that have been forming the past 500 years.

**(7) How did the Apostles become known as ‘Saints’?**

The term ‘saint’ simply means ‘holy ones.’ As Catholics, we use this term with a lowercase ‘s’ to refer to anyone who is united to Christ, in a state of grace and striving for holiness. This is also how St. Paul uses the term in some of his letters when he calls the Christians to whom he is writing ‘saints.’ However, as Catholics we also use this term with an upper case ‘S’ to refer to those men, women and angels who are in heaven, who have been made perfect by God and who are in full communion with God. ‘Saint’ still means ‘holy one’ but, when capitalized, this is now being used as a title to indicate that they have finished the race and have received their imperishable crown of glory from God. The Church does identify some of those Saints in heaven by name BUT there are numerous others in heaven whose names we do not yet know.

How is one identified by name as a Saint in heaven? There are a variety of people throughout history whom the Church tells us we can know with certainty are in heaven.

The Church recognizes that in the history of the Church, there have been many men and women who, by God’s grace, have stood firm in their faith even when faced with persecution and martyrdom. For those who are known to have been Christian and, for love of God died accepting martyrdom rather than renouncing the faith, Jesus tells us their reward will be great in heaven (Matthew 5:11-12). Thus, these martyrs for Christ, who are known by name, are some examples of those people the Church knows are in heaven and, thus, she calls them by their new title. These include people such as Saint Peter the Apostle, Saint Andrew, Saint Paul, Saints Perpetua and Felicity and Saint Catherine of Alexandria.

The Church also recognizes that not only martyrs are in heaven. There are many others who, by the grace of God, lived lives of heroic virtue and have received the eternal reward of heaven. After death, there is a process that occurs called “canonization” where thorough investigations are done looking into the person’s life.

In some cases, if there is sufficient evidence, the Church may conclude that we can known with certainty certain people are in heaven (examples would be Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Gianna Molla and Saint Teresa of Calcutta). There is so much more that can be said about this process of identifying those in heaven by name. But keep in mind, there are many more in heaven whose names we do not know this side of heaven but they will be known by all on the Last Day.

If you are interested in learning more about the process of canonization, here are some resources:

<https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-process-of-becoming-a-saint.html>

<http://www.dummies.com/religion/christianity/catholicism/how-to-become-a-saint-in-the-catholic-church/>

**(8) “Why do Catholics not speak in tongues?”**

My understanding is that there are two things referred to when this phrase “speaking in tongues” is used: (1) a charism of the Holy Spirit; (2) a method of praying.

(1) There is a unique charism of the Holy Spirit given to select people by God – the charism of speaking in tongues. With this charism, one is given the gift of speaking a language in which they have never been trained. The demonstration of this charism necessitates that another person be present who can interpret what is said.

For example, in Acts 2, we see this charism of speaking in tongues in action at Pentecost. It is received by some of the disciples in Jerusalem and then we are told that, miraculously, people from all over the known world were present and could understand what was being said. So a fisherman from Galilee, untrained in a specific world language, could suddenly speak such that a man from Asia was able to understand him.

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians and indicates that some in this community had received this charism of speaking in tongues. Paul tells them the purpose of this gift is for the building up of the Body of Christ and specifically is intended to help bring unbelievers to the faith. This gift helps those who possess it share the gospel and Paul emphasizes this is nothing to boast about. As Catholics, we DO recognize this charism is real and some are given this though it is not a gift commonly expressed.

(2) The other form of “speaking in tongues” is a term used to describe when a person prays using words or utterances but these are unrecognized by listeners. Though this form of ‘speaking in tongues’ in prayer is done by some Christians (including some Catholics) BUT this is not the same thing as the charism of the Holy Spirit. (With the gift of the Holy Spirit, as mentioned above, always being performed when what is said is miraculously understood by another.)

**(9) “What is the difference between ‘Apostle’ and ‘disciple’?”**

The term ‘apostle’ simply means 'to be sent'. As St. Paul tells us in some of his letters that in the Church are many members and these members all have different callings and charisms. Some people are called to be teachers, some evangelist, some healers, some apostles, etc. So the idea of an ‘apostle’ can just mean one who is given a vocation of being sent out to preach the Gospel.

But when the term is capitalized – Apostle – this refers specifically to the Twelve men called in a unique way by Jesus Christ. We are told in the Gospels that Jesus called: Simon called Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Jude/Thaddeus, Simon and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 10:2-4). After Judas betrays our Lord, in Acts 1 they must replace him to fill this office of an Apostle and Matthias is chosen (1:26).

We are also told the necessary qualifications to be one of these specific Twelve Apostles: a man must have been with Jesus Christ from the time of his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist and must have remained with Christ until his Ascension (Acts 1:22). This was a unique office and so after the death of these Twelve men given the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, no one else would be given this formal title of “Apostle” [capital ‘A’ to signify the unique role they had with Jesus Christ].

These twelve men did have successors to continue in their duties and to guard and protect all Christ had come to reveal, but these successor would be referred to as “the successors to the Apostles” (the bishops). It is true St. Paul refers to himself as an ‘apostle’ and he most definitely was given the vocation of apostle but not in the same exact sense as these Twelve. St. Paul was called by Jesus Christ in a very unique way and was sent out by Christ to preach the gospel so he is rightly called an apostle but there is still a distinction between him and these Twelve men called ‘Apostles’ [capital ‘A’].

As to “disciple,” this term means a “follower of a teacher/leader.” With Jesus, all those who follow him are called “disciples.” The Apostles are disciples as are the priests and bishops and lay people. All disciples of Christ are called to go out and preach the Gospel in various ways and all are called to strive for holiness in their lives. Among the disciples, all have varying gifts given to us by God and we are called to use them to help build up the Body of Christ – His Church.

**(10) “Where would I get a list of the books good to be read and those that were condemned by the early Church? I know there is a ‘Gospel of Mary’ which speaks of the childhood of Christ – which list is this on?”**

First, there are the books eventually recognized as being inspired and to be listed in the canon of the Bible (and read at Mass). These are the 73 books (46 in the OT and 27 in the NT) found in every Catholic Bible.

The next list would be the books not consider inspired. These could not be read at Mass but were considered good to be read. These could have some errors or inaccurate statements but overall were felt to be pious and not suspected to be written by heretics. These included:

\*Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, Didache, Epistle of Clement

\*PLUS: Any of the men considered to be an “Early Church Father” are also important to read and, though their writings are not inspired and not without error, they are witnesses to what the early Christians believed. These would be men such as St. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, St. Justin Martyr, St. Bishop Irenaeus, St. Bishop Clement of Alexandria, St. Bishop Augustine, St. Bishop Ambrose, St. Bishop Cyril of Alexandria, and many others. (You can find their writings at [www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org))

The final list were those books considered unsuitable and which perverted the Catholic faith. Often written by heretics, these were condemned. Here are just a few:

\*Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Thomas, Acts of Andrew, Acts of John, Acts of Pilate, Acts of Paul and Thecla, Gospel of James, Gospel of Bartholomew, and many others (at least 50 Gospels, 22 Acts, smaller number of Epistles and Apocalypses)

\*There is a Gospel of Mary (Magdalene) that was most likely written by the Gnostics and so was included in this list of not being recommended by the early Church

\*The Gospel of Thomas (written by the Gnostics) includes information about the childhood of Jesus and there is no evidence it is accurate. This Gospel was rejected by the early Church

\*With all of these condemned books, one can read them but must realize they are likely written by heretics and, though there could be some truth in them, as a while they are not faithfully teaching what was handed down from Christ through the Apostles

**(11) “Do we have to take what the Holy Father says at full value and believe it as truth?”**

The answer depends on many factors including: (1) in what role the pope is speaking (as head of the Church versus as a man/theologian/pastor), (2) what the pope is speaking about (on faith/morals or separate topic), (3) to whom he is speaking, and (4) if he is intending to be teaching something that all must be believed.

At the heart of this question is the Church’s teaching on infallibility. Let me explain this term:

The pope/holy father is the bishop of Rome and successor to Saint Peter (and he has a unique role as St. Peter did among the Apostles, being the chief Apostle). When a man is appointed to this office [of successor to St. Peter as bishop of Rome], one charism (gift) that is given to this office is the gift of infallibility.

Infallibility: This means that the Holy Spirit is safeguarding truths by preventing one from the possibility of making an error. This is a gift from God to protect the truths revealed by Christ to His Apostles – it preserves them from error and corruption as they continue to be handed down through the successors of the Apostles to us today.

This gift is given to the pope singularly (see Matt 16:19) and it is also given to the Magisterium as a whole (the teaching office of the Church) which consists of the bishops of the world in union with the pope (see Matt 18:18).

Infallibility is different from inspiration. Inspiration means one is guided by the Holy Spirit through a special positive Divine assistance. The human agent who is inspired by the Holy Spirit is not merely preserved from error but so guarded that what he writes is truly the word of God and God Himself is the principal author. The example of this which we have are the inspired Scriptures. The Bible is inspired because God co-authored it with human beings and because of this we hold that the Bible is inerrant (which means without error). But the pope is NOT inspired in this way when he speaks but rather he is given the gift of infallibility.

This gift of infallibility only applies to specific situations: only when teaching on matters of faith and morals to the entire Church and intending to teach something the entire Church is to believe. Infallibility does NOT mean that the Holy Spirit is telling a person exactly what to say or how to say it. This gift does not guarantee that the pope will clarify or speak up when a topic is debated [even if many feel the pope should say something]. This gift does not give the pope and bishops any form of infused knowledge so they still have a duty to study and learn the faith.

A pope can have opinions as a man / as a theologian and he can speak his mere thoughts. When he does this, we do give deference to his office (as pope) and we listen sincerely to his words BUT, at the same time, we acknowledge these ideas for what they are – opinions. We do not have to agree with his opinions. If the pope speaks on matters of the economy or politics and not on faith and morals, again these would be in the realm of opinion and we can disagree. Additionally, if the pope is speaking on matters of faith or morals but is giving his opinion, this is not protected by the gift of infallibility.

Infallibility also does NOT mean that the person/people making the infallible statements are holy and upright in their lives. It is possible that the pope and bishops could be hypocrites teaching one thing and living immoral lives. And it is because the pope and bishops are men – and as such sinners – that it was necessary for God to give this gift of infallibility to the Church. This way, the Holy Spirit guards and preserves the truth, preventing the pope/Magisterium from making an error if they choose to speak definitively on matters of faith and morals.

This can be a very confusing teaching and it is one often very misunderstood. If you have additional questions on this, please ask!

**(12) “What does symbolon mean?”**

This idea of a ‘symbolon’ comes from a concept known among the Greek culture. The idea is this:

When two parties are making a contract or who are wanting to have a form of identification for each other, they would make a symbolon. They would take a clay seal and break it in half. Each person takes a half. At a future time when reunited, if the two halves match, this confirms the identity of each party. This idea of a clay seal is a ‘symbolon’ – a sign of identity.

For example, if I was a banker and you gave me money to invest, then we would take a unique clay seal, break it in half and each keep a piece. When you return to collect your money, I (the banker) ensures your identity by making sure the two halves of the symbolon match up perfectly.

For the early Christians, the Creed was seen as a ‘symbolon’ in a figurative way – it was a sign of unity among believers and it kept them connected to the early Church. The Creed expressed some of the foundational beliefs of the Church handed down by Jesus Christ and, by professing it, you identified yourself as a Christian and member of the Church.

**(13) “If Greek was the first or one of the first human languages then could it have been the language of God?”**

God does not have or need a human language because He is God. He communicates to us in various ways and at times does use our language to speak to us but He is not limited to this.

The language the first books of the Bible were written in was Hebrew. This is because, as tradition holds, Moses wrote these first five books and he spoke Hebrew. Much of the Old Testament was later written in Hebrew as well because God continued to reveal Himself in a unique way to the Hebrew people. Later, some books of the Old Testament were written in Greek (several hundred years before Jesus was born) because this was the predominant language of the known world at the time they were written. The New Testament was written in Greek initially (with the possible exception of Matthew being written in Aramaic as well as Greek) and this too is because Greek was the predominant language of the known world at that time.

It is not so much that these were the languages of God but that it was these moments in history God chose to reveal Himself in the written word and so He used the language of the authors through whom God was working to co-write these books.

**(14) “Was Mary with Jesus throughout his life and death?”**

From what we know from the Bible, Mary was with Jesus throughout his life. Now this did not mean that she always traveled with him everywhere he went, as this was not likely the case. But she was his loving mother and never abandoned him. She never lost faith. She did stand at the foot of the cross and she held his dead body. We are not told about the Resurrected Jesus appearing to His mother Mary, but it is hard to imagine that Jesus, who loves perfectly and who would have loved his earthly mother deeply, would not have made her personally aware of His Resurrection. We do not know this with certainty but keep in mind, the Gospels are not intended to be exhaustive. Many things happened that we are not told about (see John 21:25). We also know that the Virgin Mary continued to be a faithful disciple as we see her with the disciples in Acts 1:14.

**(15) “Did Adam and Eve teach their children about God?”**

I think there is no doubt. From the time of Adam and Eve until the time Moses started to write the first books of the Bible, oral traditions were how the teachings about God were handed down.

**(16) “Why did God wait so long to send Jesus [to become man]?”**

We do not know the precise answer. But we do know that God is all-knowing, all-loving, perfectly just and merciful and knows what is best for us. God’s ways are perfect and whatever He does is for the best of all of us. And God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4) so He will act in ways that will make this possible. And God will never coerce us but always acts out of love for us. So keeping these things in mind, we can look at history and know that this side of heaven we cannot fully answer this question but we trust God’s plan and in His providence.

**(17) “How old was Jesus when he was crucified?”**

Most likely 30-33 years old

**(18) “If Jesus did not sin because of his divine nature, why do people say he came to earth to show us how to live without sin? People make it seem like it was sheer strength of self-control but it was because he had the divine nature as well right?”**

Firstly, just a reminder of who Jesus is:

Jesus is a Divine person with two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. As we discussed in class, you can think of this in one sense as an operator (person) and the operations possible (the nature) [though this is only an imperfect analogy]. Because Jesus is God the Son – the Second Person of the Trinity – he fully possesses all the attributes of the divine nature (eternal, infinite, perfect, all-knowing, all-powerful just to name a few). When God became man (the Incarnation), this Divine Person united himself to a human nature and so possessed the attributes of this nature as well (including having a body, a soul, a human will, a human intellect to name a few).

One difference with Jesus and human beings is that he was always without sin. Why was he without sin? Because when the Divine Person united himself to a human nature, he never stopped being God. And there can be no contradictions within God, so God who is perfect could not in any way possess sin or imperfections or doubts. Because he is God, the divine will of Jesus is always in union with the divine will of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

When God the Son united himself to a human nature, he freely chose to unite the human will perfectly to the divine will. While it is true that because he is God he would have never have chosen otherwise, it is in this act of freely choosing to unite his human will to the divine will that he is an example to us. And Jesus also became a model of perfect obedience showing us how God calls us to live – selflessly, faithfully, obediently and lovingly.

It is true we are not divine as Jesus is. And God knows our limitations better than we know them ourselves. But God still tells us that Jesus is to be the model of humanity because he shows us a human life lived perfectly. This is what we strive for. But some may look at Jesus and say that this is an impossible request since we are not God. Yet Scripture abounds with commands for us to be faithful, obedient and loving (Matthew 7:21; 19:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21 as a few examples). AND we are commanded to become perfect (Matthew 5:48)! If these commands were impossible for us to achieve, the sheer fact God sets these goals for us would be unjust, yet we know God is perfectly just so this cannot be the situation.

How do we explain this? When God asks us to do these things, he does expect us to be obedient but we are not left to our own devices. We are not abandoned by God to try to work things out on our own. To help us throughout this earthly life, God offers us the gift of his grace. This grace is God’s own divine life infused into our souls at baptism and in the other Sacraments. Grace is a supernatural power God offers us. Grace enables us to have faith, be obedient and to love. Grace transforms and perfects us if we allow it to be at work in us. By cooperating with it, we unite ourselves to God fully – with our entire being. By the power of grace at work in us, we are moved by truth, goodness, love and virtue, united to God always. We are enabled to convert our hearts deeper each day and to grow in holiness and perfection.

**(19) “Can there or will there ever be another being like Jesus?”**

I think it depends on what you mean.

One thing is definite, humanity has been redeemed once and for all by Jesus’ death on the cross – heaven is now possible for all of us. We do not need God to become man again as everything that was necessary for us to be redeemed was accomplished by Jesus Christ and what Jesus Christ did was sufficient for our salvation.

But one thing that is going to happen is that Jesus Christ is going to return. At the end of time, on the Last Day, God has revealed to us that Jesus Christ, in His glorified humanity, will descend from heaven surrounded by angels in a powerful, visible manner for all to see. When this happens, there will be the resurrection of the bodies of all those who had died and then all humanity will experience the General Judgment. So in this sense, Jesus will return to earth again.

[There is much that can be said about this Second Coming, but this topic goes far beyond answering this question. I encourage you to read the Catechism where it discusses this topic and let me know if you have specific questions on this.]

**(20) How do I explain to my family Catholics do not worship Mary?**

In the last class, there will be some time spent discussing Mary. I will briefly answer this question and the next question (also about Mary), but if you have additional questions after the last class, let me know.

Catholic teachings about Mary are often very misunderstood so I ask anyone with questions or suspicions about the teachings related to Mary to take time to really find out exactly WHAT the Catholic Church holds. One of the most common questions I hear is exactly wat your family is asking you: Why do Catholics worship Mary? When answering this question, it is important to be very clear that in no way do Catholics worship Mary! As Catholics, we hold that worship is for God alone. To worship any creature is idolatry and a grave sin.

Having said that, we do honor Mary. Now honor is something we do all the time in our lives. We honor our military soldiers who sacrifice their lives to protect our freedoms. We honor students who excel at their academic work. We honor athletes who have made great accomplishments. So it should not be surprising that within our Catholic faith, we honor the men and women throughout Christian history who have been heroic in their faith lives. We honor Saints Peter and Paul, Matthew, John, Mary Magdalene, Elizabeth and many others. It is good to give honor where honor is due and all those who have been witnesses for Christ in this life are deserving of our veneration.

With Mary though, she has a special place in the Church. Mary was a human person just like us, but she was called by God to play a special role in salvation history when he called her to be the mother of Jesus. God did not force Mary to accept this role. God asked Mary and she freely said yes to God’s will for her life. Mary dedicated her life to God, being docile, humble and obedient all the days of her life. She loved Jesus more than any of us, not only as a disciple but as his mother. All of this was possible by God’s grace and Mary freely cooperated with it.

Because of how she lived her life, Mary is an important role model for us. Like Mary, we too are given the gift of grace. We should always cooperate with God’s grace in our soul as it moves us to love God and be obedient to him. Like Mary, we should be freely willing to always do God’s will. We should love God above all things as Mary always did. She was also Christ’s first disciple and most faithful, never doubting him. Never turning away from him. Loving Jesus unconditionally. We should imitate her in these things. And because of her life, we honor her.

So much more could be said. This short video I created may help as well. Please ask additional questions on this if you have them.

<https://youtu.be/WiM5R5A3oco>

**(21) “Hail Mary full of grace: Why did the angel say these words? Was it because she was going to carry Christ? Or because she already possessed grace because of her own Immaculate Conception?”**

Why did the angel describe Mary as being “full of grace”?

When the angel greets Mary, he does not call her “Mary” at all. The angel greets her with a title saying, “Hail full of grace.” This title “Full of Grace” is remarkable and, if you investigate the Greek word used here, it means one who has been and continues to be filled with grace (so a past event that continues now and into the future). This title is referring to a truth about Mary that God has revealed to us through Scripture and Tradition and that the Church has held from the beginning. This teaching is called the Immaculate Conception.

Mary’s mother was Anne and her father was Joaquin. From the very moment of Mary’s conception in her mother’s womb, God filled Mary’s soul with grace in a unique way. God bestowed this gift to Mary freely, it was nothing Mary had earned. But in God’s plan, he had chosen her to bear the Son of God in her womb if she accepted this request. So in preparation for this event, Mary was conceived without original sin and grace filled her soul. This gift from God enabled Mary to remain without sin all of her earthly life. Mary still had free will. Mary still had to cooperate with this grace so that it would transform her and perfect her, but she was filled with grace all her life. This is why the angel Gabriel said what he did when he encountered her as she was truly full of grace.

Why was Mary given this special gift of grace from the moment of her conception?

God had a plan for Mary. Mary was going to be called to be the mother of Jesus – who was God become man. And because Jesus was both true God and true man, the womb that would bear him on earth needed to be perfect and pure. It needed to be without stain or blemish, without sin, since God cannot contain any sin or evil within himself. From the moment of Mary’s conception God was preparing this pure womb for Jesus. Mary was preserved from sin by God not because she earned this but because it was a necessary part of God’s plan – to have a pure, undefiled temple for the dwelling place of God on earth.

There is a lot of evidence I could give to show how Christians have held to this idea throughout the centuries and there is implicit evidence even within Scripture to suggest these truths. But for brevity sake, I will send you two links to read and then if you have other questions, feel free to ask me and I can explore this further.

(1) <https://www.catholic.com/tract/immaculate-conception-and-assumption>

(2) <http://www.catholicbridge.com/catholic/mary_conceived_without_sin_immaculate_conception.php>