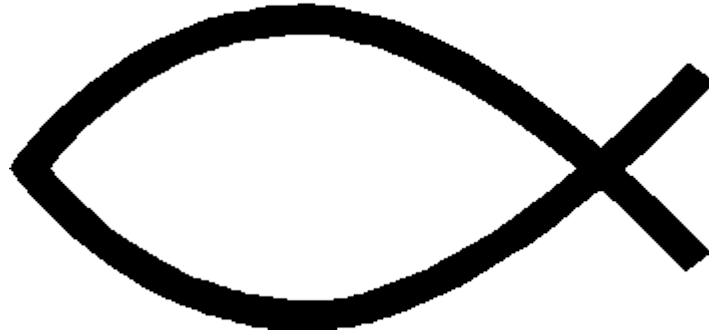


## LESSON ONE



# Getting Started On The Way

One of the first ways of speaking about the Catholic Faith was that of being on “the Way.” This ancient phrase was used by the Church in the earliest days to distinguish what it meant to be a disciple of Christ. Even before we were called Christians, we spoke of “the Way” of holiness and “the Way” of discipleship. It is good for you to think of your exploration of Catholicism and your journey towards full communion within the Catholic Church as being a pilgrimage or a journey. But how does one get started on “the Way”?

There are many ways of learning about Catholicism. Sometimes we can look online. Sometimes we can read books. One of the most important things you can do in your journey is to begin to explore, but sometimes when we look around, we can find things that confuse us (either because these things are too difficult to understand at first, or because these things are in error). We can lose our way if we are not careful. We hope to provide some guidance in your search, but we also encourage you to seek beyond these resources, just so long as you keep in mind that misinformation abounds when it comes to Catholicism, so the more official the source the better.

Still, one of the best ways we can begin to apprehend and comprehend Catholicism is just to let it all wash over us and seep in. Coming to mass every Sunday is the way most Catholics learn about our faith, and it happens through the liturgy (or worship) of the Church. Letting the readings touch our hearts, hearing the homilies and prayers, singing the psalms and hymns and participating in the worship of those around us will help us to more deeply appreciate what we seek to know and (we hope) live.

The word “pedagogy” means a way of teaching and learning, and so as you continue to read through your COMPENDIUM, you are encountering the *theology* of the Church in the pedagogy of catechesis (question and answer) but there is *also* the pedagogy of the liturgy itself. We learn from the worship of the Church. Each Sunday (indeed each day of the church’s calendar) is different, and each of these days are opportunities for us to learn something new about the Catholic faith and the history of grace that unfolds before us in the readings of the scriptures and in the recalling of the saving acts of God. The saints also parade before us in the liturgy of the Church, and we can reflect upon their lives and their virtues as models, as examples and as friends. Don’t be afraid to join us in worship (even daily). You don’t have to be able to receive Holy Communion to worship the Lord, and your presence on Sundays is a real test of your willingness to take seriously this Catholic life.

# Understanding the Way Catholics Worship

Some people presume to begin with the Bible, and we are very proud of the Bible, which is a collection of the various testimonies or covenants that the Lord has used to draw us to himself over the ages. The OLD TESTAMENT that is familiar to the Catholic is the OLD TESTAMENT that was familiar to Our Lord when he was a boy, and the NEW TESTAMENT is a collection of narratives of the life of the Lord as well as some letters that were written in the first generation of the Church. Beginning to read the Bible from page one and going through to the end is an ambitious undertaking, but allowing the scriptures to unfold for us within the context of the liturgy of the Church can be a more organic way of understanding scripture at first. The Catholic priest doesn’t just pick something

to read, but he is tied to the LECTONARY (an official book), where the Church wisely spreads the readings out over the years in a logical way, and pairs complimentary texts together to show how one prophetic anticipation after another is fulfilled in the life of Christ our Lord. Also the readings of the LECTONARY fall within the seasons of the year, so that the Christmas season reflects readings that anticipate the birth of the Lord, and tell us of his earliest days of life, whereas the readings around Easter are directed towards the last days of his life.

You don't have to own a LECTONARY (almost no Catholic does), but encountering the scriptures this way is to acknowledge that the liturgy is the real home for Sacred Scripture. Why do we say this? Well, the stories the apostles and evangelists told over and over again were eventually written down, and these (together with the letters the apostles sent in those early years of the Church) were read in the assembly of the people over and over again, and in time they were recognized not only as authoritative texts (penned by the apostles who knew the Lord personally) but also as "official" texts within the worship. This is how the various letters and narratives of the Bible became compiled into what we *now* think of as a single book, but the Christians in the second century didn't own a Bible, but they did know these texts & stories, and they knew them through worship.

If this interests you, you may consider purchasing a MISSAL of the Catholic Church. They make Sunday MISSALS (for Sundays only) and they make daily MISSALS (for days other than Sunday). They also make MISSALS that have both Sundays and Weekday readings (which is ideal). The MISSAL is a book that helps one to begin to worship like a Catholic, seeing the readings and the prayers before one, so that one can learn the doctrine of the Church through the indoctrination of our worship. If a Catholic goes to Mass every Sunday for three years, he or she has gotten through almost the entire Bible by the end of those three years. If the same Catholic goes to daily Mass, he or she can more or less hear it all in two years. Long before the printing press made it possible for the average person to own a book, or even to learn to read, this was the general way (or "school") wherein Catholics received the ancient writings that were preserved for us in and through the liturgy. If this looks like something that interests you, consider the following:

- You can buy the *Our Sunday Visitor* DAILY ROMAN MISSAL (2004) for less than \$100, which has both the Sunday and the weekday readings, and includes some devotional texts as well. You can order this from a Barnes

and Noble. This is a handsome book which you might find very useful for your household.

- Still, if dealing with MISSALS (and all their pages and ribbons) is too daunting, a less green and more disposable option is to order a subscription to MAGNIFICAT magazine, which gives you a perhaps more accessible way of learning to pray as a Catholic (including not only the readings and texts for the Mass, but also a simple daily morning and evening prayer). If this sounds interesting, check out [www.magnificat.com](http://www.magnificat.com). Even if you just subscribe for one year, it will help you get the rhythm of Catholic prayer.

Having said that, this is *not* to discourage anyone from owning or reading Sacred Scriptures by any other means, and if someone would like to purchase a good translation of the ancient Hebrew and Greek scriptures into a modern English rendering suitable for Catholics (that is containing all the canonical texts), a person might consider purchasing a REVISED STANDARD VERSION OF THE BIBLE from Ignatius Press. A Protestant Bible is *mostly* complete, it will certainly do in a pinch, and it should be handled with piety and with respect, but owning a good Catholic version of the Bible may be a good *next step* towards your greater fullness of the Catholic Faith. If you are interested in purchasing one of these Bibles online, go to Ignatius Press website: [www.ignatius.com](http://www.ignatius.com).

# Homework Follows

- Explore online (if possible) the website entitled MY CATHOLIC TRADITION ([www.mycatholictradition.com](http://www.mycatholictradition.com)), which among other things has a reasonably good presentation of the Mass.
- Check out the website for Thy Kingdom Come ([www.tkc.net](http://www.tkc.net)), which can help you to understand and appreciate better the Catholic Mass.
- Schedule a meeting with the priest or the catechist. You will need to call and set up an appointment, and then come in a chat as you approach the completion of your reading of the COMPENDIUM of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Write down your questions and bring them with you, but don't be surprised if Father asks *you* questions of his own, to see if you have apprehended sufficiently this initial part of your work together.
- Fill out the following questionnaire, and bring it in with you when you come.

# Secondary Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions, and return this information to us.

1. If you have been baptized, did you have an official record of that baptism mailed to the parish yet?
2. Have you discussed your answers and your letter from the Primary Questionnaire with Father or the catechist?
3. Does the priest or catechist anticipate any problems based on those initial answers, and if so have you begun to work through those problems?
4. Have you completed reading the Compendium?
5. Do you have any questions regarding what you have read? If so, turn this page over and write down those questions so you can discuss them at our next meeting.
6. Are you attending weekly Sunday Mass at the parish?
7. If not, why not?
8. Have you been exploring the on-line sites we have recommended?
9. If so, what are your impressions?
10. Have you been able to find EWTN on your cable television?
11. Are you praying as well as studying, and if so, what is the fruit of your prayer?

12. How are things at home? Are your family members and friends being reasonably supportive of your discernment and search into the Catholic Church?

13. Do you still feel like the Lord may be leading you to learn more?

14. Are you ready to read another book?