

Talks to a Non-Catholic About Religion

Five Pre-Marriage Talks

By Rev. G. P. Flatley.
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My Friend:

I am very glad of this opportunity of talking to you.

You are getting married, and I want to see you happily married. So I would like you to listen to me for a few minutes, because what I have to say is vitally important to the success and happiness of your married life.

Does it Matter?

You are going to marry a Catholic, that is, somebody of a different religion from your own. All right. There are some people, of course, who think and say that religion doesn't matter, doesn't make all that difference in marriage - 'As long as they love each other, and try to pull together, what does it matter?' Oh, it matters quite a lot.

You see, in married life the more things a husband and wife can share with one another, the greater will be their union and contentment. And the deeper and more personal those things are, the greater is the desire to share them.

Now, there's nothing deeper or more personal to a Catholic than the Catholic religion and all that it means. That is why we say that the ideal set-up is when one Catholic marries another Catholic. We don't say that in any kind of snobbish superior way. In this matter we have the interests of the non-Catholic at heart just as much as the interests of the Catholic. After all it is only plain common sense; you can see the point in it yourself. When two people of the same religious beliefs and feelings marry they've got something very personal which they can share with one another straightaway. For instance, if you were a Catholic now, thinking of marrying another Catholic, that would be the ideal set-up from the point of view of religion and marriage.

"So What?

"But you are not a Catholic, which, of course, is a matter of your own personal business between yourself and God. And so, seeing that you are going to marry a Catholic, there are two things that I want you to do in order to bring the 'religion' side of your marriage as near the ideal as possible.

First of all, let there be from the start a firm understanding that whatever you quarrel about during your married life, you will never quarrel about religion. That would be fatal. So before the marriage takes place at all, we will ask you and your future partner in life to sign what we call "promises" - namely:

that in your married life there will be complete freedom of religious practice, and

that if the marriage is blessed with children they will be brought up as Catholics.

Once those points are settled, a good foundation is laid for success and harmony. (Please note that since Vatican II, I will no longer absolutely insist that you both sign these promises, but they form a good basis from which we can continue our discussion.)

The second thing I want you to do is to get some idea of what this Catholic religion is all about, what it is that makes Catholics tick. You are going to live with them all your life, and don't you think it will be a great help if you have some idea of what goes on in their minds, what things they believe, what things they do, what things they consider right and wrong; that they won't be some kind of secret society where you never know what is going on.

"Let's get down to it"

Let's get at the question this way. Let's ask "Why is a Catholic a Catholic at all?" That looks a very simple question, but it isn't. There is a lot in it that doesn't hit the eye straight-away. As a matter of fact, there are three important questions involved in that one; and we must answer the first two before we can give a sensible answer to the third.

The first question would be: "Why do we bother about religion at all?" Why fill our minds with certain beliefs, and govern our lives with certain commandments and laws? Why don't we just live our days without bothering about things like that? Well, why? Simply, because We believe in God... Now what does that mean? It means this: that we believe that this world and everything on it, men, women, and children, animals, flowers, birds, sun, moon and stars, all those things didn't just happen by chance but were all created, that is, made out of nothing by an all powerful Being whom we call God. Even if we never heard of the Bible, our ordinary reason and intelligence would lead us to that conclusion.

If a man told you that a wristlet watch, with all its wheels and springs and its time-keeping just happened by chance and was not designed and made by an intelligent craftsman, you'd say "Don't be talking nonsense, things like that don't fall together by accident." Just the same, it would be equally foolish for a man to say that this world, or even one little part of it, came into existence without the mind and power of God behind it; God who was always there and never had a beginning. Further, just as it is a fact that God is responsible for all life in the world and for the world itself, so too, it is a fact that if God's power didn't keep in touch with us every single second, we'd all go out like a light... And, talking about lights... what happens when you flick on the electric light switch? The power shoots through the wire to the lamp and we have light. And it isn't enough, in order to keep the lamp lighting, just to flick the switch. The power must keep coming through or the light goes out. So too with us. It was not enough for God to make us in the beginning. He must keep us going all the time with His power, or we would disappear back into nothing.

We are completely dependent on God for the fact that we are here at all, and for the fact that we keep on being here.

It is clear then to any sensible person that God is our complete Lord and Master, with every right over us and every power. We are His subjects by our very nature.

"Consequences"

Our belief in God isn't like our belief in the existence of America or Antarctica, a belief that has no practical bearing on our lives here in Australia at all. We believe that there is such a place as

America, but that belief doesn't bother us one way or another. But when we believe in God, we can't just believe that He is there and bother no more about Him; we must believe in the reasonable consequences of that belief - namely that God has a perfect right to tell us what we are to do and how we are to live, and that doing what God wants us to do and living as God wants us to live is the most natural thing in the world for us.

Which is all only another way of saying that 'having religion' or 'practising religion' is the most natural and sensible thing in the world. Because 'having religion', and 'practising religion' means simply and completely 'making an honest effort to do what God wants us to do'. Making an honest effort to lead our lives as God says we should lead them - that's religion.

It does not make much sense saying that you will serve God in your own way, or in any other way except the way He wants. After all, if God wants it one certain way, that's the only way that counts.

"How do we know it?"

We can expect, then, that since God wants us to lead our lives according to certain directions He took the trouble to make those directions known to us... Which brings us to the second question: "How did God make known to us His laws and His true religion, and why do we believe that Jesus Christ is the one true teacher whom we must follow if we want to be saved?"

In the sacred book called the Bible we have the history of God's dealings with the human race. The Bible is God's book, written by specially chosen men under the direction of God. It isn't really one book, but a collection of different books written by different writers who were inspired by God what they were to say. These books were all collected by the Catholic Church and it is on the authority of the Catholic Church that they were given to the world as the "written word of God." We read there that God set up for the people special leaders who were enlightened by Him in the things that He wanted the people to know and to do. Through these leaders God made known His law, and the people knew well what God wanted from them.

Then the time came when the most perfect leader and teacher of all came - Jesus Christ. He came to teach us exactly what God wanted from us, to tell us all about God and His law. So that if we want to know exactly what it is that God wants us to do, how He wants us to lead our lives, and how He wants to be honoured and served, all we have to do is to learn all about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. He is the one true teacher, teaching with the authority of God. We believe in Him because He gave us reason for doing so. He did things called miracles that only God could do. He gave every possible proof of the fact that He was no ordinary man, but God-man. So we are Christians, that is, followers of Christ and believers in Him.

"Carry on the good work"

Christ stayed on this earth for only 33 years, and of those years he spent only three in publicly teaching the people. He did many wonderful things for the people, gave them many wonderful things, and told them many wonderful things... And remember... whatever He gave to those people He wanted us to have it too. We who live so many years after His coming on earth are just as important to Him as the people who were living in His day and spoke to Him face to face. He had to make some arrangement whereby He could give us everything that He gave them. He wasn't going to stay here on earth always Himself. He was going back to heaven. So He left an organization, a society, here on earth to carry on His work.

We read in the Gospel how He picked the foundation members of that society and how He trained them... kept them with Him, and let them hear Him and see all that He did; how He gave them special private courses - all to prepare them for the work He had ready for them when He went back to heaven.

So when the time came for Christ to go back to heaven He had ready a society which would carry on His work in the world. The one and only work that society had to do was to tell the people whatever Christ Himself would tell them if He were here personally, and to give the people whatever Christ Himself would give them if He were present. In other words, the society which He founded was to represent Him, to speak for Him, to act for Him, to tell the people for Him how they were to live if they wanted to live according to the law of God.

It is now becoming clear that if we want to know what God wants us to do and how God wants us to live, or in other words, if we want to know the real, true religion, we must belong to that society which Christ left on earth to carry on His work, and our lives must be guided by its teaching. Only then can we be sure that we are serving God as He wants to be served.

Now all Christian people, no matter what denomination they belong to, will agree that there is a God whom we must obey and serve;

that God sent Christ to teach us the perfect law;

that Christ left a society to carry on His work with the people of the world till the end of time.

Up to this point there is agreement. But from this point on the rot sets in and divisions begin... so that we have hundreds of churches in the world all claiming Christ for themselves.

"The Third Question"

The third question comes up for answer. Why, out of all the possible churches in the world, does a person pick the Catholic church for his membership? Why does he say that the Catholic Church is the one he must belong to?

A Catholic believes in God; he believes in Christ; he believes that Christ left a Church to carry on His work, and he believes that the Catholic Church is that Church left by Christ. And why does he do that? You see, if he didn't believe that, he would not be a Catholic for another minute. But he does believe it and for this simple reason: Supposing you had a pony (or a cow) and one day it strayed off and got mixed up in a big mob of other ponies (or cows). How would you go about looking for it? You'd say: "My pony has got my brand on it. All I have to do is to ride through that herd of ponies and cut out the one with my brand. I recognize my pony by the brand I put on it."... And that's how we find the true church out of all the others in the world. There was a time when there was only one Church, and that Church had on it the unmistakable brand of Christ. So, among all the churches in the world we look for the one with the brand of Christ. When we find it we say: "This is the true Church of Christ. We must belong to it. It has the marks that Christ placed on the Church he founded. It has the brand of Christ."

And that's why I'm a Catholic. It is a good thing for you to remember that I, together with all other Catholics, your future life-partner included, am completely satisfied that the Catholic Church carries on it the brand of Christ. That's why we are confident that if we want to know exactly what God wants us to do, and how God wants to be served, all we have to do is to listen to the guidance of the Catholic Church.

We could talk a lot more about the different points that I have mentioned in this outline. We will meet some of these points in later talks. But just for now, I think I have said enough to show you that the question of religion is very important seeing that you are getting married to a Catholic.

And I hope that I have given you some idea of why a Catholic is a Catholic at all, by showing you that a Catholic has good reasons for being what he is.

God bless you.

Second Talk

My Friend:

Do you mind, if before we go on to talk about anything else, we get the main points of our last talk straightened out in our minds.

You remember, we answered the question "Why is a Catholic a Catholic?" and we saw that the answer comes in three parts.

The first part: a Catholic practises religion at all because he believes in God, our Creator and Master, and practising religion means leading our lives in the way God wants us to lead them;

Then: A Catholic is a believer in Christ, a Christian, because he accepts Christ as the Saviour and Teacher of mankind who taught the world exactly what God wanted;

And finally: A Catholic believes that Christ left a society or Church on earth to carry on His work, and that this Church is the Catholic Church.

That is why a Catholic is so happy and confident that in doing and believing what his Church directs and teaches he is doing exactly what God wants him to do - and that's all that matters.

"Back to Beginning"

Let us keep that outline stored in our minds as we go back to take up the story at the very beginning...

Now, there was a time when there was no man, woman, or child, no human being of any kind on this world. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were made out of nothing, created, by God, their immortal souls being directly breathed into the first man by God Himself. They were placed by God on an earth which for them was a real paradise. They had everything that could make them happy and content - there was no actual moral evil of any kind, no sickness, no trouble, no irksome work, no death for mankind - nothing to upset or worry them. Best of all, God looked on them as his own children, and promised them that if they obeyed Him in one particular thing, passed one particular test, then after a certain time, their happiness here would be changed to even greater happiness in heaven.

And the Bible tells us God told them not to touch the fruit of one particular tree: He put their obedience to the test.

Unfortunately for them, and for us, they fell down on the test, disobeyed God. They 'took the forbidden fruit', and so threw away so many if not all the good things they had. From that moment they were no longer free from laborious work and from worry and sickness and physical and moral evil, and from death. No longer were they children of God with the right of going straight into

heaven when they passed from this life. Heaven was closed against them, and they found that this their first sin (Original sin) left them with an inclination to sin that they never had before.

It would have been bad enough if Adam and Eve had lost all those good things for themselves alone: but they lost them for all their descendants as well. Just as all their descendants would have shared in the good fortune if they had not disobeyed God. So that means every child that is born into the world is stamped with the sin of Adam, Original Sin, and needs to be freed from that sin before it can set out along the road to heaven.

"Hope for All"

In the hour of their greatest misfortune, however, when they were expelled from the garden of happiness, God did not leave Adam and Eve without hope. He promised them that a Redeemer, a Saviour, would come: and that this Saviour, by His life and teaching and good works, would make up to God for the sins of the human race, restore in part the good things that had been lost, open the gates of heaven, and teach us exactly how to live if we wanted to get there.

So a Saviour, a Redeemer, a Messiah, was promised, and the whole history of the old testament in the Bible is the story of the people waiting and hoping for the Saviour to come.

Now, nobody but God himself could be our Saviour, because nobody but God could do all the things the Saviour had to do. So that the coming of the Saviour meant the coming of God himself down to earth.

God could have come on earth in many ways. He could have come in a great show of power and glory. He could have come as a full-grown man, or in any other way He liked. But He decided that He would come into this world like we all come into it, by being born of a human mother.

But before we get any further, there is an important truth about God Himself that we must mention - the truth called the Blessed Trinity. This truth is a mystery, that is, something we believe because God himself has told it to us, but something which we do not understand with our small minds. The Blessed Trinity means that there is but one God and in that one God there are three persons, equal to one another, distinct from one another. We call them, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (or the Holy Spirit). Each is God, still there is only one God. We cannot really understand that, but we accept it because God has told it to us.

"The Great Coming"

Now, to get back to the coming of God on earth to be Himself our Saviour, we find that He chose one particular woman out of all the women in the world who were or who could be, to be the one from whom He would be born. And He sent a messenger from heaven to her as she knelt in prayer in her home at Nazareth.

The Holy Scripture describes the scene for us. The angel comes in and tells the maiden, whose name was Mary, that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Saviour. She answered immediately: "This cannot be I have promised God that I will remain a virgin all my life, and so I can never become a mother."

Then the angel explained to her that she would conceive the child within her through the power of God and not through the presence of a human father. The angel concluded: "And, therefore, the Holy which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God."

When Mary understood that she would become a mother and still remain a virgin she said: "Be it done to me as God wishes." And at that moment the child was conceived within her.

Later on, to the puzzled Joseph the same Angel said: "That which is conceived is of the Holy Ghost and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1).

From that day Mary led the ordinary life of a young mother expecting her child.

The beautiful story of the birth of the Child Jesus, is recalled for us every Christmas. You are familiar, I am sure, with the main events surrounding the birth and early days of the Saviour. The humble birth in the shelter at Bethlehem, the coming of the shepherds and the Kings or Magi to worship him, the wicked King Herod who tried to have Him killed, His escape in the arms of His mother into Egypt, and then His return to the Holy Land when Herod died, and His settling down to the quiet life of a carpenter in the little mountain village of Nazareth, where from His twelfth to His thirtieth year all we know about Him is what St. Luke puts in one sentence... "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and men."

"Where is Mary?"

Let us stop here for a minute to consider a very important point. The Child Jesus was born from Mary. She was really and truly His mother and He was really and truly her Son... just as you are your mother's child. Your mother was not any nearer to you, did not do anything more for you, than Mary did for her Child. And just as you - if you were asked to point to your mother - would point to one particular woman and say "There she is. She is my mother.>"; so, if you asked Christ to point to His mother, He would point to Mary and say: "There she is. She is My mother." Please remember that, because it gives you the explanation of all the honour that Catholics give to Mary, of all the names and titles they give her... Blessed Virgin, Virgin Mother, and greatest of all, Mother of Christ, Mother of God... Mother of God, not because she existed way back before God, but because she is the real mother of Christ, and Christ is God. The nearer a person approaches to Christ the more worthy is that person of honour. We honour persons because of their nearness to Christ. Nobody is nearer to Him than Mary, His mother.

When you consider these things you should not be surprised that we give so much time to Mary. Rather you should be worried that outside the Catholic Church people try to remember the Son and forget all about the mother. That's not the way Christ wanted it. Mary never ceased to be His mother, nor did He cease to be her Son.

"By What Authority?"

Now let us take up again the life of the Saviour as He begins His public life of preaching and teaching, the last three years of His life that were to end in His death on the cross. The first thing He had to do when He appeared in public was to prove to the people that He was really the Saviour, that He spoke and acted with the authority of God, that He really was God. Christ was in fact two things: He was God and man. He was always God: He was man as well from the time of His conception with Mary... the one and the same Person, Christ, God the Son, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

The method Christ adopted to prove all these things was very simple. He backed up all His statements by doing things that only God could do, by doing what are called miracles. It would, of course, be impossible in just a short talk even to name all the wonderful things that Christ did. So I cannot recommend too strongly that you get a life of Christ, or better still, a copy of the New

Testament, and read there for yourself all that He did and said. He did not force anyone to believe. He gave sufficient grounds for belief to anyone with the good will not to be prejudiced against Him.

After three years of doing good, enemies rose up against Him, and brought about His condemnation to death. Christ, of course, need not have submitted to them if He did not want to. In His power as God He could have wiped them off the face of the earth. But He didn't do that. He allowed things to take their normal course, allowed Himself to be brought before a faked trial, allowed Himself to be tortured, and finally put to death, so that by His death He might make satisfaction for the sins of mankind, and open heaven that had been closed by the sin of Adam and Eve.

"The First Church"

After His death on the cross and His burial in the guarded tomb, Christ gave one final proof that He was God. He came back to life again from the grave under His own power. For forty days He remained on earth with His followers, and then having completed their training, and having instructed them on all they were to do, He went back up into heaven. His work on earth was done. The society which He left to carry on that work came into action under the direction of the Apostle St. Peter; the first Christian church, the church called by Christ "My church" began to function. (See Matt 16:18)

Now let us examine that first church, when there was no doubt about it being the one true church of Christ. We find that it had certain marks or brands on it for which we must look if we want to know where it is today among all the churches in the world claiming Christ and His authority.

Read history, read the New Testament, and you will find that in that first church there was complete UNITY - agreement, oneness. Unity of belief, because, of course, Christ brought only ONE message for all men. Wherever that church was, it must believe and teach the same things and continue to do so always. There was unity of organization - with the Apostle Peter at the head, and all in complete union under him. There was unity in all worshipping God the same way - the ONE way approved by God Himself (of course using the different languages of the different peoples, whether Hebrews or Romans or Corinthians or whatever). Have a look, sometime, for that mark of unity in any of the churches you know. I'm afraid you won't find it anywhere, except in the Catholic Church.

Then the Church Christ left after Him had the mark that it was for ALL MEN and for ALL TIMES - which prompts the question, "What Church has existed for all mankind from the time of Christ down to the present day and looks like going on to the end of time?"

Then, the true Church not only showed people HOW to be good, but HELPED them to BE GOOD with directions and sacraments: and has actually produced numberless exceptionally good people.

Finally, the Church which Christ left was founded on foundation members called APOSTLES, twelve of them under the head apostle, Peter. There is no need to ask any question about this because History tells us clearly that the Catholic Church is the only one that can actually claim the apostles as foundation members. Just one instance - the present Pope, the head of the Catholic Church can be traced back one by one, Pope after Pope, right back to St. Peter, the first head of the Church. In 1956 the present man, Pope Pius XII, is the 262nd Pope since the time of Christ - he is 262 in the line of which St. Peter, the apostle, is number one. {John Paul II is 266th in that same line.]

"What Then?"

When we have found the true Church, the next step is to put ourselves under its guidance, as it does for us what Christ would do if He were here personally.

Now what work did Christ actually give this Church of His to do? We know in general that the Church was to act for Him and to speak for Him. That is why Catholics take their Church seriously - when the Church speaks, it is Christ Who speaks. So what the Church is to do for us is:

to teach us about God and what we are to believe about Him and everything connected with Him; to direct us how we are to live, how we are to govern our moral lives according to the law laid down by God; to help us to believe, and to help us to act according to God's law by giving us the special helps left by Christ, the Sacraments.

And so the Church:

tells us about God; tells us about the law of God;

gives us the sacraments to help us to believe and to do all that is required from us.

The Church tells that God will reward us with everlasting happiness in heaven if we make an honest effort to lead our lives according to His Law. It tells us that God leaves us free, leaves us our free will, to choose to be His friends, or to choose to be His enemies and so cut ourselves off from Him for ever in hell. It tells us that God wants all of us to be with Him in the happiness of heaven, and will give us all the help we need to get there if we do our part.

At another time we will talk about the law of God by which we should govern all the actions of our lives, and about the sacraments that help us to keep that law. But, we have enough to think about just for now. So: God bless you.

Third Talk

My friend:

The Church teaches us the Law of God: it explains to us God's commandments.

And when we talk about God giving us ten commandments by which to govern our lives, we should not fall into the mistake of looking on them as ten restrictions placed by God on our pleasure. They are not so much restrictions of our freedom as ten directions given to us by God with the solemn assurance that if we guide our lives according to them we will get the most out of ourselves during our life on earth, and make sure of our happiness hereafter.

Supposing you made some kind of a machine and put it on the market for sale. When offering it to a buyer you would say to him, "If you want to get the best out of this machine, follow these directions, then you can't go wrong. I know, because I made it."... So God says to us: "If you want to get the most and the best out of yourself, follow these ten directions and you can't go wrong. I know, because I made you.

So, God wants us to lead our lives according to these ten commandments.

Let's Have a Look at Them

They were first given by God to Moses for the Jewish people before the coming of the Saviour. When Christ came He gave them with renewed emphasis to all mankind. In them we have a complete guide, covering our obligations towards God directly, towards ourselves, and towards our neighbour.

(Your neighbour is everybody living in the world at the present moment, no matter who they are, or what colour or what religion.)

The first three commandments outline our duties towards God: telling us, in general, to have respect for God Himself, to have respect for His Name, and to see to it that there is public respect for God.

"I Am the Lord"

The first commandment says: "I am the Lord your God, you shall not have strange gods before Me." By this we are commanded to adore God and to adore Him alone. We adore Him when we acknowledge Him as the supreme Lord and Master of us all, to Whom alone is due the highest honour and worship.

We adore Him when we believe in Him, when we trust Him and His promises, when we make His law the guide of our lives out of love for Him, when we pray to Him, and when we offer sacrifice to Him.

We cannot, of course, properly adore God unless we know Him. We cannot know Him unless we learn all He wants us to know about Him. We cannot learn all He wants us to know about Him unless we belong to the Church He gave us.

This first commandment forbids: Heresy, i.e., believing wrong things about God; Infidelity, i.e., refusing to believe anything about God; and Schism, i.e., disobedience to the church which God has given us.

It also forbids two contrasting sins at opposite extremes: Despair, a lack of trust and confidence in God and His promises; and Presumption, a false and foolish expectation of salvation without taking the necessary means to obtain it. Of course, straight-out hatred of God is a terrible breach of this commandment. Other sins against this commandment would be: want of respect for any person or place connected with the worship of God (the desecration of such person, place or thing is called the sin of sacrilege); the selling of spiritual things for profit (simony); all kinds of superstition, e.g., the worship of idols or totems or demons, as well as taking part in fortune telling, spiritism, black magic, omen, spells, chain prayers, star worship, etc. All these things are forbidden by the first commandment, by which we acknowledge God, and nobody else, as the Supreme Master.

By this commandment we honour the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints and angels, not for their own sakes, but because they are friends of God: we honour the church because God has given her to us to make us good: we honour representations, pictures, images, statues, not that in themselves they are anything, but because they remind us of God or His friends. Finally, since Catholics believe that God wants to be worshipped only in the way He has approved, they are bound in conscience by this commandment to worship Him as Catholics in the Catholic church, and for a time were forbidden to take any part in any non-Catholic services. (This last restriction was lifted after Vatican II when, for serious reasons, Catholics are permitted to attend other services in addition to fulfilling their Catholic worship responsibilities.)

"The Name of God"

The second commandment goes like this: "You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain." By it we are commanded to speak reverently of God and all associated with Him. We should never use the name of God, the name of Jesus, or the name of Christ, except in a holy and serious way. You use the name of God in this serious way when you speak to Him in prayer.

You use the name of God when you take an oath to tell the truth. If you saw someone struck by a car and were brought into court to tell all about it, the judge would make you swear an oath, or take an oath. He would get you to say words something like these: "With God looking at me and listening to me, I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." That would be taking an oath. If then you told the whole truth and nothing but the truth you would give honour to God. If after taking the oath you told a lie and purposely kept back any of the truth, you would commit the sin of perjury, a dreadful insult to the name of God.

This commandment forbids anything like wishing or praying that God would send evil to somebody, i.e., cursing. It also forbids using God's name or the names of His saints in a disrespectful or foolish way.

"The Sabbath"

The last commandment in this division, the third, says: "Remember to keep Holy the Sabbath Day." It directs us to keep Sunday holy by attending to our prayers and other religious duties, and by not doing any unnecessary servile work. Catholics are bound to go to Mass on Sunday, and not to do any unnecessary heavy manual work, that could easily be done some other day. Reasonable recreation of any sensible kind, swimming, tennis, football, golf, etc., is not forbidden on Sundays, and, generally, is to be recommended, especially for young people.

These, then, are the first three commandments telling us how we must honour God and do our duty to Him. The next seven tell us our duties to ourselves and to our neighbour.

"Father and Mother"

The first people we come in contact with are our parents, and the fourth commandment directs us to love, honour, obey, and respect them always. It also directs that we obey all our lawful superiors and the laws of our country.

By this same commandment, parents are bound to be worthy of their children's love and obedience. They should love their children and teach them by word and example to be good and honourable. They should attend to the training of their children from their earliest days, instilling into them, quietly and lovingly but none the less firmly, that children obey their parents and do what they are told without murmur. Many parents neglect that obligation, and allow their children to grow up selfish and self-willed, just doing what they like around the house. It is too late to cry about it when the child has grown up; the harm is done. The training must begin right at the beginning.

Parents should see that their children get a reasonable opportunity to learn all about their religion and practise it: and that they get a good chance of being educated and trained for life: that their bodily health and welfare is looked after. They should remember that they will have to answer to God for the children He entrusted to their care.

"Life is Precious"

The fifth commandment tells us of the respect we should have for life, our own life, and the lives of other people. We should never do anything that would put our own lives or the lives of other people in danger of being lost, unless there be some extraordinary reason for taking the risk. Murder, the unjust taking of the life of another; suicide, the taking of one's own life; anything that places our life or bodily security in danger, fighting, quarrelling, hatred, anger, desire for revenge, lack of

reasonable care of our health, all these things are forbidden by the fifth commandment, which is worded: "You shall not kill."

From the moment a child is conceived within its mother, it is a person, and has a right to life the same as you or I. To interfere with that life is murder.

Another point about this fifth commandment is this: God has given us not only our lives, but conscious control over ourselves. We are conscious that we are masters of our own actions and thoughts. We are in control. For a person to interfere with that conscious control that God has given him over his life and actions, to interfere and deprive himself of that control by drink or by drugs or any other way - without sufficient medical reasons and under trustworthy supervision - would be a sin. For instance, when a man through excessive drinking loses control of himself and no longer knows what is right from what is wrong, he breaks the 5th commandment seriously.

"Wonderful Powers"

So the fifth commandment is the commandment of respect for life, as we have it from God. The next commandment is the commandment which urges respect for the powers which God has given to men and women of bringing New Life into the world.

The sixth commandment reminds us that God gave to men and women a share in His own work of creation. He gave them certain powers in their bodies which, when used according to nature, can bring new life, new people, new children into the world. These powers, usually referred to as the sex powers, are to be used in the way and at the time laid down by God:

in the married life, and in the manner nature itself teaches.

Any use of them outside lawful married life is forbidden. Any abuse of them inside or outside married life is likewise wrong. So the sixth commandment forbids all immodest sex actions with ourselves or with others. It condemns as a dreadful sin the sin of adultery or unfaithfulness in a husband or wife.

Closely connected with the sixth commandment is the ninth, which forbids all immoral thoughts and desires.

"To Each His Own"

The seventh is the commandment of honesty. It forbids us to take or keep what we have no right to. It forbids us to cheat. It forbids us to damage what belongs to another.

Its associate commandment, the tenth, forbids us even to wish to do any of these things.

The seventh is worded: "You shall not steal."

"A thief cannot expect forgiveness of his sin of theft unless he has made up his mind to give back as far as he can what he has stolen. A worker who idles is like a thief, because he takes payment for work he has not done. An employer who does not pay fair wages is also like a thief because he keeps for himself what belongs to his workers."

We should pay what we owe, always: and if we find anything we should make reasonable effort to find the owner and return it.

A serious sin against this commandment would be to take what would cause a serious inconvenience to the other person, e.g., to take what would correspond to one day's pay for that

person. To take from anyone or any company, no matter how rich, an amount corresponding to about the basic weekly wage would also be a serious sin.

"Our Good Name"

We are left now with only one commandment, the eighth - the commandment governing, in general, respect for truth and our neighbour's character. It says: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour," meaning, "You shall not bring against your neighbour complaints that are not true."

If we steal away our neighbour's character, we must make every effort to restore it again. Just as his property is his until he publicly throws it away, so, too, his character, his good name, is his until he publicly throws it away.

The eighth commandment forbids Calumny: spreading false stories about someone; Detraction: making known the secret faults of someone; also, backbiting, insulting words, revealing secrets confided to us, hypocrisy, and telling lies. To tell a lie is to say something we know to be untrue to deceive somebody else.

"For Catholics"

This, then, is an outline of God's law, and Christ says, "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." These commandments bind every man, woman, and child in the world, whether they are Catholics or not. All are bound to keep them.

But we may mention here that Catholics have, in addition, a few regulations which bind Catholics and nobody else. For instance, Catholics are bound to go to Mass every Sunday, were forbidden to eat meat on Friday (and since Vatican II now have a very sobering obligation to do some form of penance on Fridays) in memory of the fact that Christ died for us on Good Friday. Catholics are bound when getting married to be married before a Catholic priest and two witnesses - otherwise the Church will not recognize the marriage (although in truly exceptional circumstances they can apply for a dispensation in these matters). They are bound to confess their mortal sins at least once a year, to contribute according to their means towards the upkeep and working of their parish, and to receive Holy Communion at Easter time.

Catholics were bound to send their children to the Catholic school if there was a Catholic school in their district. Even now they should make strenuous efforts to fulfil this duty, and if unable to fulfil it to see their parish priest to ensure religious instruction is provided for their children by catechists or Sunday instructions or by family tutoring.

The Church also appoints certain days and times, e.g., Lent, when Catholics are supposed to restrain themselves in food and other lawful pleasures, as a penance for their sins.

"Sin"

To sin is to break God's law consciously and freely. There is Original Sin which we inherit from Adam and Eve, and is on our souls when we are born and unbaptized. There is Actual Sin, any wilful thought, word, deed, or omission of our own doing contrary to the Law of God.

A Mortal sin is a grievous offence against God's law, a big offence against a law we know to be serious and which we freely and consciously break.

Venial sin is a smaller or lesser sin against the Law of God.

Mortal sin makes us enemies of God by our own choice. If we were to die with a mortal sin unrepented, that would have dreadful results for us. It would mean that we chose to die enemies with God, and, so, freely elected to keep away from God, to be always separated from Him. It would mean that we freely chose to go to hell rather than to heaven.

God wants us all to make an honest effort to keep His commandments. He knows that by doing so we will get the best of ourselves here, and ensure our happiness hereafter in heaven. And that's a worthy thought on which to finish.

"God bless you."

Fourth Talk

My friend:

The keeping of the commandments and the leading of a really good life is not as easy a matter as it might sound. We find that it requires a good solid effort. And in that effort we need the help of God. Human nature being what it is, and human inclinations being what they are, it is no easy matter to keep the law of God in big things and in small, day in day out, day after day, right through our lives. There will be times when we will be in grave danger of slipping up and falling into sin. So Christ comes to our rescue, and gives us the means: -

of making strong our weak nature, of overcoming temptations to break His law, and of leading a really good life in close friendship with Him.

"The Life-Line"

Christ has left us the lesson of prayer: telling us what prayer is: that it is, simply, talking to God... telling Him all our worries and weaknesses and wants, and saying to Him whatever is in our hearts, AND telling Him how much we love and thank Him for His goodness. To get in touch with God, all we have to do is to turn our minds to Him and we are in contact immediately. He knows what we are saying and listens to every word.

Prayer is the life-line that keeps us in contact with God... if we break that line, by not having prayer in our lives, we are then out on our own, and we shall fail. Just as an advance division of an army must keep its lines of communication with the main army clear and intact, or it will be cut off without help, so we must keep our life-line of communication with God clear and intact, too, or we will find ourselves without the help we badly need.

We have Christ's word for it that every prayer, every honest prayer we say, is heard and answered by God. We should never let a day go by without saying some little prayer, without having some little word with God.

God wants all men to pray to Him. He wants His friends to pray to Him that they may share more and more in His friendship. He wants His enemies to pray to Him, so that they may become His friends.

Our approach to God in prayer should be:

Honest and Humble, remembering who we are and who He is; Trustful in His willingness to help us; Resigned to God's will, ready for a refusal from Him if He so desires; and Persevering, keeping at it without loss of confidence.

Now, what particularly should we ask for in prayer? We ask for two kinds of things. We may ask God for temporal favours, e.g., good health, plenty of money, good looks, etc. He may give it to us and He may not. He sees further than we can. He will give it to us if He sees that it will help us in some way to save our souls. He will not give it if He sees that it will be the cause of turning our minds away from Him and leading us into sin. But, even when He refuses something we ask for, the prayer is not lost and wasted.

He will give us something else that will be to our good...

We may ask for spiritual favours, those that will help us to save our souls and get a higher place in heaven. God will never refuse us the help to save our souls, if we ask for it in the right way and keep on asking.

It is a very solemn thought: if we pray we will save our souls: if we don't pray we cannot save them.

"The Great Seven"

As well as the lesson of prayer, Christ, our Saviour, has given us seven other great helps to strengthen us along the road to heaven. We call these seven helps, Sacraments: He has left them with the Church for us.

You see, we Catholics believe that Christ thought as much of the people living now in our time as He did of the people living in His time on earth. Everything He gave personally to the people of His time, He wanted us to be in on it too. So, the seven sacraments, are just seven ways that Christ left the Church of giving us something that He would give if He were here personally, or that He would have given us if we had been living long ago while He was actually here on earth. "First Need"

Our first great need of Christ comes when we are born: because then we have on us the brand of Adam, original sin, and until it is taken off, we are not associated with Christ the Saviour and cannot benefit from the salvation and graces He won by dying for us on the cross. So we receive the sacrament of Baptism as soon as possible after birth. The priest is the ordinary minister of Baptism, but in case of necessity when no priest is available, any person can administer it validly - provided the person says the right words, does the right actions, and has the right intention of doing what Christ wants.

This is how a person gives Baptism: he pours water on the head of the person he wishes to baptize, saying at the same time: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

The result of receiving Baptism is:

that original sin is taken off; a sharing in the life of God, called Sanctifying Grace, is given to our souls: which Grace makes us God's children with the right of going to heaven; makes us belong to the Church.

And once we belong to the church, and only then, we can receive the other sacraments. In fact, we might say that the work of the other six sacraments, each in its own way, is to preserve or restore in our souls that sharing in the life of God which we get at Baptism, making us children of God. The great battle of our lives is to remain children of God, retaining His life and grace in our souls by avoiding serious sin or by sincerely repenting of serious sin committed.

"Three Others"

The sacrament of Confirmation confirms or strengthens the faith we receive in Baptism. It makes us more courageous and active in the practice of our religion. It is usually given by a Bishop.

The Last Sacrament, (now more often correctly called the 'Sacrament of the Sick',) the sacrament of the Last Anointing, which a priest gives to a dying person or anyone seriously ill, when he is called on a "sick call," is to help that person to die well prepared as a child of God, and so get right into heaven, or even to have a full healing and recovery while still on our earthly pilgrimage.

The priest who gives this sacrament is made a priest, an official minister of the Church, with power to act for the Church and Christ, by reason of another sacrament which he receives, Holy Orders.

Now, of the four sacraments we have mentioned, three can be received only once; Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. The Sacrament of the Sick (or of Last Anointing) can be received as often as a person is seriously ill or in a danger of death through sickness or frail old age.

We are left with three sacraments for consideration: Confession, (which is sometimes called Reconciliation, or Penance,) Holy Communion and Marriage. We will leave the consideration of marriage till later, and give our attention now to what Catholics mean by Confession, Holy Communion, and closely associated with Holy Communion, The Mass.

"They Are Forgiven"

As soon as some people hear the word "Confession" they bristle up and get on the attack straight away. It seems to affect them as would the mention of some gruesome inhuman practice. This seems very strange to Catholics, you know, because they have personal experience of Confession, and they look on it as one of the most consoling practices of their religion. They would not give it away for anything. So there must be something in it that other people don't know about and have missed.

What is confession? It has something to do with sin; you know that. Something to do with having sins forgiven. What you want to know is: What is the strength of the whole thing?

You remember I have repeated a few times what I consider a very important fact - that whatever Christ gave to the people in His day on earth He wanted that we should have the opportunity of getting it too. And you may remember from the life of Christ that at times some people came to Him and told Him that they had been leading sinful lives, but that now they were converted and wished to have their sins forgiven, so that they could start again with a clean slate to lead good lives from then on.

We have the example of Mary Magdalen - a well-known sinner in the city; she heard Jesus preaching and saw Him going around doing good to all; she was led by what she heard and what she saw to come to Him in sorrow and ask to have her sins forgiven. Jesus forgave them.

"What About us?"

If we had been living at that time, we, too, could have come to Him and told Him of our sins and of our sorrow for them, and humbly asked His pardon. Our sins would have been wiped out and we would be friends with God again.

But we are living many years after Christ. We have not got Christ here personally to go to. So what is there to do ?

Christ knew all this. He knew that we would need and would desire the opportunity of having our sins pardoned. And one of the good things He left with His church was the power to pass on to all who are truly repentant the pardon they desire. On the evening of Easter Sunday, the day He rose from the dead, Christ came to the followers, the apostles, who were gathered together in one room. He blessed and said to them: "Receive all you the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them. Whose sins you shall retain (not forgive), they are retained" (not forgiven). That is how the power to forgive sin was handed by the Saviour to His church, so that we who come after Him might have the opportunity of having our sins pardoned.

When a Catholic goes to Confession what he does is this: he comes to the special confession place in the church, a private alcove or recess divided into two by a partition or wall. The priest sits at one side of the dividing wall, the person making his confession kneels at the other. (Or he may choose to come around to the other side and sit 'face to face' to the priest.) An opening in the wall is about face high and is covered with wire gauze. The penitent mentions what sins he has had the misfortune to commit, he declares that he is sorry for them and determined with God's help never to do them again. The priest, using the power of the sacrament of Penance passes on to that person the pardon of Christ, says the words of pardon, and the sins are forgiven. The person is now reconciled with God. There must be absolute sincerity on the part of the person seeking pardon, sincerity in the telling and sincerity in the sorrow.

"One Who Knows"

Catholics are quite happy and comfortable about going to Confession, for many reasons, some of which would be: the fact that they believe that Christ has given us confession in order that we might get free of our sins:... the fact that the priest in confession is there as the agent of Christ, what he hears he hears for Christ, and so is bound by the strictest secrecy never to reveal - even at the cost of his life - anything told to him in confession. The sacredness of confession is something a priest regards more than his own life.

Then, confession gives us something we all desire, somewhere we can confide all our secret worries in the completest confidence that they will be treated with sympathy and preserved in absolute silence and inviolable secrecy. It gives us, too, something which we need as well as the pardon of our sins, the assurance that they are pardoned. If you tell somebody that you are sorry for offending them, you will wait expectantly to hear them assure you that everything is all right again. The same with our sins and God. We can, and should, tell God directly that we are sorry for our sins, but God uses Confession as His answer, telling us that our sorrow is accepted and our sins pardoned.

It would be a mistake to take your ideas about confession from people who have never been to confession... just as it would be a mistake to take your ideas of Sydney from people who have never been there. And if people who have been to Sydney tell you all about it and tell you it is a good place, it is much more sensible to believe them than to accept the ideas of people who have never been there in their lives. If you ask Catholics you will find that they look on confession as one of the most consoling practices of their religion, and they thank God heartily for it.

"Christ and Calvary"

Now, what shall we say about the Mass and Holy Communion? We could not hope to explain them fully, considering that books and books have been written about just one little aspect of them. But what we can do is to give you some idea of what they mean to Catholics and why.

You know that by allowing Himself to be put to death on the cross, Christ made satisfaction for all the sins of the world, and brought salvation to all of us.

While He was hanging on that cross He thought of us who were to come so many years after Him. We didn't exist at the time of His death, but we were in His mind. And He wanted that in some real way we could be associated and united with the offering which He was making of Himself for us. Had we been there, and had we known what Jesus was doing, we could have knelt at the foot of the cross, and could have been associated with it directly.

Jesus made an arrangement whereby the offering of Himself on the cross comes down through the ages, giving to each age the opportunity of being associated with it. That arrangement we call the Mass. That is what the Mass is: it is the offering and death of Jesus brought in a real, though invisible, way, from the hill of Calvary to the altar where Mass is said.

The Mass is Calvary in our midst. In the Mass, Christ offers Himself for the salvation of the whole world, with a particular application of His merits to the people attending that particular Mass.

On the cross Christ sacrificed Himself for our salvation. In the Mass we have the same sacrifice, because we have the same Offerer (Jesus), the same Victim being offered (Jesus), and the same offering. But the Mass is not in every way the same as the Sacrifice of the Cross. Jesus suffered and died on the cross, but He does not suffer or die in the Mass: Jesus Himself offered the sacrifice of the cross, but He offers the Mass through the priest we see at the altar.

The Catholic Church teaches that the Mass is the best way to adore God, the best way to thank Him, the best way to remove His anger and to gain His love. That is why Catholics are expected to attend Mass at least once a week, on Sundays. That is why they reckon that there is nothing in this world higher or holier or greater than the Mass.

In order that people may be able to attend Mass intelligently, devoutly, and profitably, prayer books are available, giving directions and explanations and suitable prayers.

Over every altar at which Mass is celebrated hangs a figure of Christ dying on the cross, to remind us that we don't go to Mass just to sing hymns, or to hear sermons, or to gather together for private prayers. These things can and do occur during Mass-time with great spiritual profit. We must remember that essentially we go to Mass in order to be associated with the offering and death of Christ on the cross.

How Christ comes to be offering Himself in the Mass: how Catholics can believe that Christ is actually present on the altar: how these things can be, introduces the question of what we believe by Holy Communion, and why we do so. But that is too much to open up now, so we will leave it for another time. Meanwhile:

God bless you.

Fifth Talk

My friend:

One of the things we would have appreciated most if we had been living at the time of Christ would have been the opportunity of making personal contact with Him, of being able to meet Him, and talk to Him, and be in His company.

We might, at times, be inclined to be envious of those people who had these opportunities. We might be inclined to think that they had something over us: that the Saviour was more generous with them than He has been with us. But, of course, that is not true. Like everything else that Christ gave to the people of His day and made arrangement for us to have as well, He also arranged that He would be present - not indeed as He was seen on earth - but none-the-less really present, in such a manner in our day that we could come to Him, and make personal contact with Him, and be personally united with Him.

He gave us Holy Communion, and when you see what Holy Communion means to us you will see what I mean.

"The Great Promise"

To get at the background and foundation of our belief about Holy Communion I would advise you to read, sometime, chapter 6 of the Gospel according to St. John. You will see there that after He had fed the people miraculously with bread in the desert, Christ promised them that He intended to give them a much more wonderful food later on. He didn't spring the matter on them. He prepared their minds for it, because it was something the like of which they never could have thought or imagined.

When the idea of "a wonderful food to come" had sunk in, He began to give them some inkling of what that food would be. Even though more or less prepared for something out of this world, when He did tell them what this food would be, their minds boggled at the idea. Some said, "This is too hard for us to take," and some, as the Bible tells us, got up and left Jesus and walked no more with Him. He saw them going away: He knew why they were going. He let them go, rather than change one word of what He had said. As a matter of fact, He repeated more clearly and in more detail what He had first declared.

Christ turned to His picked followers and said: "You have seen these people get up and leave Me when I told them what this wonderful food would be. What about you? Will you, too, go away?"

That was a test, but they came through in flying colours. Peter, speaking for the others, said: "To whom should we go if we leave You? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that You are Christ, the Son of God."

"The Giving"

Now what was it that Christ told them that those people found too hard to take? He told them about Holy Communion and what it means.

He told them that He was going to give them a food which would be Himself. When they took this food it would not be just bread, or any other substance like that, it would be Christ Himself, the Saviour Himself, coming to be united to them as really and as intimately as the food they ordinarily ate. Nothing could be plainer than the words Jesus used in telling about the Holy Communion: "the bread that I will give is My flesh... Amen. I say to you; except you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood has everlasting life. And I will raise him up on the last day."

If Christ had meant differently from what He had said, He would have told His hearers so.

It may be asked: Was Christ sincere when He made that promise? Could He make that promise good? Of this we are certain, that Jesus, being the God of all truth, would not deceive mankind with

a false promise, and likewise, being God of all power, could without any difficulty make that promise good: nothing is impossible to God.

"The Last Supper"

It was twelve months after the first making of the promise of Holy Communion before it was actually fulfilled. From your New Testament read St. Matthew 26: 26-28. The time is the night before Jesus is put to death; the place, the Supper Room prepared for His last supper with his disciples. "And whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke and gave to His disciples, and said, You all, Take and eat. This is My Body. And taking the Chalice, He gave thanks and gave to them, saying, You all, Drink all of this. For this is My Blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many."

Just as in the beginning, God said "Let there be light" and light was made, so at the bidding of Jesus, Our Saviour and God, saying: "This is My Body", and "This is My Blood", the substance of the bread and wine ceased to be, and in their place came the living Christ. In this special Sacrament (we call it the Blessed Eucharist) the Body and Blood, together with the Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ and therefore the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained. So on that Last Supper table (now effectively an altar) was the living Christ, His Body and Soul, Humanity and Divinity, complete. And Christ gave Holy Communion to His followers for the first time.

At that moment the Saviour thought of us coming so many years after Him. We, too, would desire Holy Communion. And like all the other good things He left the Church for us, He commissioned the apostles to have the power to give Holy Communion to His followers right down to the end of time.

"Catholic Belief"

So when a Catholic receives Holy Communion, what does he believe? He believes that Holy Communion is

not just a little piece of bread; not just a nice ceremony in memory of Christ; not just some kind of spiritual visit from Christ;

but that in receiving Holy Communion he receives a visit from Jesus Himself, really and truly and personally. He believes that Jesus is present in the Holy Communion just as really as He was present at Nazareth or Jerusalem. He believes that Jesus becomes present in the Holy Communion during Mass when the ceremony of the Last Supper of the night before Christ died, is repeated with the authority of Christ by the ordained priest. Jesus does not become present in the Holy Communion just because we believe it: we believe He is present because He is actually there.

That is why Catholics have such a reverence for Holy Communion. That is why the Catholic church is open all day, and why people come in and out all day paying friendly visits to Jesus in the Holy Communion preserved on the altar, the Blessed Sacrament.

You can now have some idea of why the Mass and the Holy Communion are at the very centre of the Catholic religion and its very life. The Holy Communion is Jesus Christ: the Mass is Jesus Christ offering Himself on the cross for us.

"On to Marriage"

The sacrament in which you have the immediate interest is the sacrament of matrimony, marriage, - the sacrament by which a man and woman are made husband and wife.

Marriage is a contract between one man and one woman, contracting to take each other as husband and wife for life, contracting to live together and use with one another and with nobody else the powers that God has given them for bringing new life into the world.

Marriage is, then, a life-long contract. The Catholic church does not allow divorce. Once two people are really and truly married they remain married in the eyes of God and the church for life. You may hear of a judge in court who is said to give a married couple a divorce so that they are said to be free to marry again to somebody else. But remember this: if the man and woman were baptized and truly married no judge on earth can break their marriage in the eyes of God. In the eyes of God the two remain married, no matter what the judge says. Supposing a judge were to say to a baptized person "You are no longer baptized", his words would make no difference. He has no power to take away baptism. In just the same way, his words make no difference when he says that a marriage between baptized people is at an end: he has no power to take away their marriage.

"The Children"

The primary end of marriage, the real reason why there is such a thing as marriage at all, is to bring children into the world. To use marriage and the rights of marriage while preventing nature from taking its normal course, is therefore unnatural and wrong.

Marriage intimacy is, as well, the physical expression of that 'giving of themselves completely to one another' that a husband and wife really in love wish to bring about. To interfere with the act is to frustrate the whole thing and set up a rot at the very centre and heart of married life.

When a husband and wife come together to use those powers that God has given them, they must use them as God directs and nature intends. Anything else is unworthy and sinful. They should remember that the only real way to happiness and contentment in their married lives is to stand by God. Because if they stand by God, God will stand by them and will see to it that they are happy and content... and isn't that all that matters?

Husband and wife must be loyal to each other, as the marriage ceremonial puts it, with pure conjugal love, loyal and true to the end. They should build the success of their wedded life on the great principle of self-sacrifice, sacrificing their individual lives in the interest of that deeper and wider life which they are to have in common. Whatever sacrifices they may be called on to make to preserve this common life they should always make them generously. And if they really love one another they will make those sacrifices with pleasure.

"Some Questions"

For anything else you might like to know about marriage, or about the Catholic religion, don't hesitate to ask a priest. He will be happy to help you with any information you seek.

For instance you might wonder what is this prayer Catholics call the Rosary, and what do those Rosary Beads mean?

Well, first of all, the Rosary Beads are essentially counters. A set of beads is divided into five sections each consisting of one large bead and ten small ones. As we hold the large bead we say the Lord's Prayer, called the Our Father, and on each of the small beads we say the Ave Maria, (the Hail Mary). While saying these prayers we think on some particular scene from the life of Christ. In fact

there are 15 such scenes recommended to us, five joyful scenes, five sorrowful, and five glorious. They cover the entire life of Christ from the first moment He was conceived with His mother, Mary. So that while we pray we fill our minds with Christ and in spirit join with Him and Mary as they lived on earth long ago. [Recently, Pope John Paul II has added Five more scenes to contemplate in the life of Christ. They are the scenes of Light - the luminous scenes.]

The Rosary is a very beautiful form of prayer. With its loving contemplation on the life, death and resurrection of Christ it appeals to everyone who knows about it, as Christianity itself was meant to do. It is recommended very strongly to Catholics for private recitation, and also as a wonderful prayer for the whole family to recite together.

Did you ever wonder what we mean when we talk about a place called Purgatory? You have heard and understand the idea of heaven - a paradise of complete happiness which God has prepared for those who serve Him faithfully in this life. You have heard of hell - a place of complete unhappiness where people choose to go freely when they choose to die unrepentant enemies of God through sin. Heaven is everlasting and so is hell; we have the word of God for that.

But you can visualize that there will be people who are not bad enough to qualify for hell, and who are not completely ready to enter heaven, because nothing defiled in any way can enter there. So those people who are not bad enough for hell, and who have some small defilements to be accounted for before they can get into heaven, are detained for some time on the way to heaven. There is on the road to heaven this place of waiting where small stains and faults and sins are removed before people are fit to pass through into heaven itself. Just as you might have a back porch to your house... and if you are coming in to dinner and there is some clay or mud attached to your shoes, you will stop at the back porch and kick off the mud or clay, and clean the shoes, before you walk right in. We call the place on the way to heaven where good people are detained while small stains are lifted off their souls, we call that place Purgatory.

Further, we believe on the testimony of the Bible that we can pray for the souls in Purgatory and help them by our prayers to get through quickly. "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins." (See 2 Maccabees 12:45)

Just a passing point about the Pope, the head of the Catholic Church. Do Catholics believe that he can do no wrong? They don't. The Pope is human as we all are. He must fight against temptation as all must do. He could sin just as well as we all could if he so wished.

But Catholics believe something special about the Pope, and it is this, that under certain circumstances God preserves him from making false or misleading statements. He is, as they call it, 'infallible' on certain occasions. That is, he can never make a mistake when (a) he teaches all others in the Church (b) what they must believe or do (c) in order to be saved. The Pope must always teach us what Jesus wishes him to teach. And so, as He promised, Jesus is always with the Pope, enlightening, inspiring and directing. When the Pope tells us what we must believe or do in order to save our souls, we listen to him as we would listen to Christ Himself.

Do Catholics think they are better than everybody else just because they are Catholics?

They don't. They would be very foolish if they did. The mere fact of being a Catholic will save nobody.

What Catholics know is that they, like all people in the world, are bound to keep the ten commandments: that they, as Catholics, have a few extra regulations to be observed; but that they

are given by God the extraordinary advantage of having the Mass, the Sacraments, the infallible direction of the Church, to help them to be better.

The big difference between the Catholic Church and all other churches lies not in the moral law and regulations by which members of the church are bound, but in the spiritual graces and advantages that the Catholic church has to give on behalf of Christ.

The more you find out about the Catholic Church the more you will see that for all it believes and teaches and does it has the best of reasons. You won't find any superstitious practices or foolish ideas. You won't find anything that is not in accord with reason and faith, faith in Christ the Saviour who came on earth to teach us how to live to get to heaven, and who left us a church, which we believe is the Catholic Church, to help us to believe and to do what is right... and so save our souls.

Before we part, may I say how glad I am to have had this opportunity of talking to you. I hope what I have said may have been of some help to you: may help you to make your life better and happier.

And so, it's goodbye now, and

God bless you.
