



WIN Program: Witnessing in Neighborhoods
Advanced Class on Catholicism
Week One Terminology

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Catholic Terminology

[by Matt Slick](#)

This list of terms used by the Catholic church is brief and succinct. It should help those who are learning about Catholicism and who desire to be conversant with Catholics on their terms.

1. **Absolution** - the act of releasing someone from their sin by God, through the means of a priest.
2. **Actual grace** - God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification.
3. **Actual sin** - any sin that a person commits.
4. **Annunciation** - When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was to be the mother of the Messiah.
5. **Assumption** - the taking of the body and soul of Mary, by God, into glory. Catholic doctrine, apparently, does not state whether or not Mary died, but *tradition* holds that she died and was immediately afterward assumed into heaven both body and soul.
6. **Baptism** - One of seven sacraments that takes away original sin and actual sin.
7. **Bishop** - the head of a diocese, successor of the apostles.
8. **Blessed Sacrament** - the elements of the communion supper, bread and wine, which become the body and blood of Christ. It is offered at the altar in the church.
9. **Capital sins** - the seven causes of all sin: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth.
10. **Confession** - telling sins to a priest and the Lord forgives the person through the priest.
11. **Confessional** - a small compartment where the priest hears the confessed sins of a sinner.
12. **Confirmation** - a ceremony performed by a bishop that is supposed to strengthen a person and enable him to resist sin. It is usually done at the age of 12. The Bishop dips his right thumb in holy oil and anoints the person on the forehead by making the sign of the cross and says, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit."
13. **Consecration** - a moment during the ceremony of the mass where God, allegedly through the priest, changes bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus.
14. **Contrition** - extreme sorrow for having sinned with a deep repentance concerning that sin.
15. **Convent** - A community of nuns usually gathered in a building or buildings where they live and perform ascetic duties in service of the Catholic Church.
16. **Diocese** - an area of many parishes presided over by a bishop.
17. **Dulia** - The honor given to saints and angels. see hyperdulia
18. **Encyclical** - a letter written from the pope addressed to the bishops.
19. **Eucharist** - The elements of the communion supper where the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ.
20. **Excommunicate** - the punishment of cutting off a person from receiving the sacraments and exclusion from the communion of the church.
21. **Eucharistic Adoration** - The practice where the "blessed sacrament," the Eucharist (which has supposedly become the body and blood of Christ) is displayed in a monstrance and adored by Catholics.

22. **Extreme Unction** - A sacrament given to a person who is ill or in danger of dying. It is intended to strengthen the person's soul and help his love be pure so they may enter into heaven. It is done through prayer and the anointing of oil. This is also known as Anointing of the Sick or the Sacrament of the Sick.
23. **Guardian Angel** - a special angel assigned by God to each person in order to protect and guide that person with the goal of reaching heaven.
24. **Habitual grace** - the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call.
25. **Heresy** - denial of the truths found in the Catholic Church.
26. **Holy Chrism** - the special oil used in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.
27. **Holy Orders** - one of the seven sacraments by which men, bishop, deacons, and priests, are given the power and authority by a bishop to offer sacrifice and forgive sins.
28. **Holy See** - the seat of final authority for the entire Roman Catholic Church located in Rome and positioned under the headship of the pope.
29. **Holy Water** - Special water that has been blessed by a priest, bishop, etc. or a liturgical ceremony. It is used to bring a blessing to a person when applied.
30. **Host** - the bread in the communion supper that is changed into the body of Christ.
31. **Hyperdulia** - honor and praise given only to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
32. **Immaculate Conception** - The teaching that Mary was conceived without original sin.
33. **Imprimatur** - permission needed to print certain kinds of religious books.
34. **Indulgence** - An indulgence is a means by which the Catholic church takes away some or all of the punishment due the Christian in this life and/or purgatory because of his sin even though that sin has been forgiven. This punishment is most often in purgatory but can also be suffered in this life. Therefore, indulgences remove time needed to be spent in purgatory. See also partial indulgence and plenary indulgence.
35. **Inquisition** - The court established by the Catholic Church in the 13th century in order to stop and punish heretics. If the individual(s) would not recant, then they were turned over to the secular government for punishment, often resulting in death.
36. **Laity** - the members of the Catholic church who are not in the clergy.
37. **Latria** - The praise and honor due to God alone.
38. **Legate** - An official that has been appointed as an ambassador of the Pope.
39. **Lent** - a forty day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Usually it is accompanied by some form of prayer and fasting.
40. **Limbo** - In the afterlife, it is the place of existence for those who deserve neither heaven nor hell.
41. **Madonna** - Another title for a the Virgin Mary.
42. **Magisterium** - the divinely appointed authority in the Catholic Church consisting of the Pope and Bishops whose purpose is to teach and establish the true faith without error. The magisterium alone, according to Catholicism, has the right to interpret the word of God.
43. **Mass** - a reenactment of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross in a ceremony performed by a priest. This ceremony is symbolically carried out by the priest and involves Consecration where the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus.
44. **Monk** - A person who practices a strict religious and ascetic lifestyle. It is usually practiced in a monastery with other monks.

45. **Monstrance** - a silver or gold stand that contains a circular window surrounded by a sunburst of rays. Inside the circular window is placed a wafer which is the Eucharist.
46. **Mortal Sin** - a serious and willful transgression of God's Law. It involves full knowledge and intent of the will to commit the sin. If left unrepentant, can damn someone to eternal hell.
47. **Nun** - A female catholic who has voluntarily taken vows of service to the Catholic Church, given up worldly possessions, and usually lives in a convent.
48. **Ordination** - receiving the sacrament of the holy orders.
49. **Original Sin** - the inherited sin nature of Adam that resulted from Adam's sin.
50. **Parish** - a subdivision of a diocese with the priest as its head.
51. **Partial Indulgence** - an indulgence that remits part of the temporal punishment due to a sinner.
52. **Passion** - The sufferings of Christ from the time of the Last Supper to His Crucifixion.
53. **Penance** - a means by which all sins committed after baptism are removed. The means are assigned by a priest and usually consist of special prayers or deeds performed by the sinner.
54. **Peter** - the first pope according to the Roman Catholic Church.
55. **Plenary** - complete, entire.
56. **Plenary Indulgence** - an indulgence that remits all of the temporal punishment due to a sinner (see Temporal Punishment).
57. **Pope** - Christ's representative on earth according to the Roman Catholic Church. He is the visible successor of Peter.
58. **Presumption** - the teaching that a person can save himself apart from God's work and/or that a person's works are not needed for salvation.
59. **Priest** - one who mediates between God and man and administers the sacraments and graces of God. He has received the Holy Orders.
60. **Purgatory** - a place of temporary punishment where the Christian is cleansed from sin before he can enter into heaven.
61. **Relic** - a part of the body of a saint including clothing, jewelry, etc. The relic is considered holy due to its association with the saint.
62. **Remission of Sins** - forgiveness of sins through the sacraments of baptism and penance.
63. **Reparation** - repairing the damage done to another person and/or his property.
64. **Rite** - the words and actions performed during a religious ceremony.
65. **Rosary** - A string of beads containing five sets with ten small beads. Each set of ten is separated by another bead. It also contains a crucifix. It is used in saying special prayers, usually to Mary where the rosary is used to count the prayers.
66. **Sacrament** - an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.
67. **Sacramentals** - Special prayers, deeds, or objects used to gain spiritual benefits from God.
68. **Sanctifying grace** - a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love.
69. **Saint** - A very holy person. Usually, it is someone who has been dead for many years and has been canonized by the Catholic Church. Saints do not have to pass through purgatory.
70. **Scapular** - two small cloth squares joined by a string. One cloth is positioned in the front and the other in the back. Indulgences are attached to them.

71. **Sign of the Cross** - A sacramental. It is the movement of the right hand from the forehead to the chest and then left and right upon the shoulders.
72. **Sovereign Pontiff** - The pope.
73. **Stations of the Cross** - depictions of 14 events during the passion and death of Jesus that usually appear on the walls of Catholic churches.
74. **Temporal Punishment** - suffering that occurs either in this life or in purgatory that removes the punishment of sins already forgiven.
75. **Tradition** - handing down through the centuries from mouth to mouth of the teachings of Jesus. It began with the apostles and continues unbroken to the present bishopric of the Catholic Church.
76. **Transubstantiation** - The teaching that the bread and wine in the communion supper become the body and blood of the Lord Jesus at the Consecration during the Mass.
77. **Venerate** - to honor, admire, and regard with respect.
78. **Venial Sin** - A sin but not as bad as Mortal Sin. It lessens the grace of God within a person's soul.
79. **Viaticum** - communion given to those about to die.
80. **Vicar of Christ** - the Pope.