

Glossary of terms used in Catholicism

Below is a glossary of terms you may hear used when talking about Catholicism. If there is a word in one of the definitions which you do not know, it is likely to be elsewhere in the glossary.

Dedication

To be completely devoted to something, in our case, living by the gospel values and educating children to ensure success, provide opportunities and foster stewardship.

Empathy

To empathise with someone means to put yourself into their shoes and to show them compassion, consideration, sympathy and understanding.

Forgiveness

Although the rest are in alphabetical order, the first four in our glossary are the four values which we feel help us live out the gospel values which Jesus taught.

Forgiveness is based on an Anglo-Saxon word. The prefix *for* was put before any word which they wanted to emphasise – to show completeness. Therefore, to forgive means to completely give, everything. Henceforth, Christians believe to truly forgive you must move on from any transgressions which people have made towards you and move on in friendship and love.

Generosity

Catholics must show generosity in the service of others, being generous with their time, talents and treasures.

Abba

From Aramaic meaning “father”. It is a familiar name used by Jesus for God, a bit like “Dad”; later the affectionate title of *Abbot* (the superior of a *monastery* of men) was derived from this and *Abbess*, the equivalent for women.

Abbey

The place where a community of monks or nuns live. It may also be called a monastery, convent, priory, cloister, friary or nunnery.

Advent

From the Latin *Adventus* meaning “arrival”. The season before *Christmas*, celebrating the coming of Christ to earth at Bethlehem. The colour of this liturgical season is purple/burgundy.

Agnus Dei

From the Latin for “Lamb of God”. The Agnus Dei is a text referring to Jesus as the true Passover sacrifice and is used just before Communion at Mass. It is often set to music.

Alb

From the Latin *tunica alba* meaning “white garment”. It is the second of the vestments for Mass and is a full-length sleeved white gown. It is sometimes also worn by those serving at Mass.

Angelus

From the Latin for “angel” the prayer commemorates the annunciation by the angel Gabriel to Mary. It is traditionally said at six in the morning, midday and six in the evening.

Alleluia

From the Hebrew meaning “Praise God!” It is an interjection found frequently in Scripture and the liturgy. The Alleluia verse is a joyous chant sung just before the Gospel reading at Mass, except during Lent. This is because Lent is a solemn time and so this joyful word is not used. The spelling ‘Hallelujah’ links more closely to the Hebrew pronunciation of the word, and is used more commonly by Protestants.

All Saints

A Holy day of obligation which means that you are expected to attend mass for these special feasts. All Saints is on 1st November each year and remembers the countless saints, known and unknown, who have no particular *feast-day*. It used to be called All Hallows (Old English *hālgas* which meant “saint”). The vigil of the feast, October 31st, was known as Halloween (All Hallows’ Eve).

All Souls

A day, on 2nd November, when we remember of all those who have died, and when the Christian has a particular duty to pray for their souls.

Almsgiving

Making charitable donations to those in need, of either money or items.

Altar

From the Latin *altare* meaning “burnt offerings”, and originally from *ADOLERE* “burn in sacrifice”. It is a strong oblong flat raised surface, ideally of stone on a stone base, used for the Sacrifice of the Mass. It is “dressed” with three white altar-cloths, running its full length and hanging down at the ends, and an altar-frontal, covering the side facing the people, properly of the colour of the liturgical season. The stone altar reflects the sacrifice, whereas wooden tables, often favoured by non-Catholic Christians, reminds us of the table of the Last Supper. At school, we have a wooden altar as a stone one would not be practical. It is has been blessed and we treat it with reverence (respect) and therefore do not use it as any other table or place everyday objects on it.

Anointing

Rubbing blessed oil onto the skin, usually on the forehead, as a sign of healing and strengthening. It is used in Baptism and Confirmation, in the Ordination of priests and bishops, and Anointing of the Sick, all of which are Sacraments.

Anointing of the Sick

A sacrament for healing which should be given at the onset of any serious illness. It can may be repeated several times.

Apostle

One of the 12 original followers of Jesus Christ as named in the New Testament. The term disciple is sometimes mistakenly used for the original 12 apostles. Disciples are followers in a more general sense.

Archbishop

A senior bishop, heading an archdiocese, appointed by the Pope. An archbishop has oversight of a number of dioceses. The current head of the Church in England and Wales is Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster.

Ascension

When Jesus returned (ascended) to Heaven.

Assumption

The dogma that the Virgin Mary was assumed (taken) in body into heaven at the end of her earthly life (believed to be at Ephesus in Asia Minor). It is a Holy day of obligation on 15th August.

Beatification

The third of four steps in the process by which a dead person officially becomes a saint. Requires at least one miracle to have been attributed to intercession of a candidate for sainthood who, once beatified, is given the title blessed. This is the title given before 'Saint'.

Benediction

A short service in which the consecrated, or blessed, wafers of altar bread, known as hosts, are placed in a monstrance (receptacle in which the host is displayed) for the congregation to venerate. Catholics believe the bread becomes the body of Jesus in the process of its blessing by a priest, and that sharing it at services commemorates the last supper shared by Jesus and his apostles, and Jesus' sacrificial death by crucifixion.

Bidding Prayers

From the Old English word *biddan* meaning "to ask". The term *Prayers of the Faithful* may also be used. They are the intercessions made after the sermon or Homily at Mass.

Bishop

A bishop is the third level ordination (after deacon and priest), appointed by the Pope. There are 22 dioceses in England and Wales and nine in Scotland. In the larger ones a bishop may be aided by auxiliary bishops. (From the Greek word *episcopos*, meaning overseer.)

Bishops' Conference

Assembly of diocesan bishops from a certain area. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (president: Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster) is separate to the Bishops' Conference of Scotland (president: Archbishop Philip Tartaglia of Glasgow).

Blessed Sacrament

The host (bread) consecrated during a Mass and distributed during communion. The Blessed Sacrament is also kept in a locked container (tabernacle) behind or beside the altar from where it is taken for distribution to the sick and veneration during services of Exposition or Benediction.

Cassock

A full-length sleeved garment, buttoned down the front, worn as the foundation garment for vestments, and in many religious communities as the ordinary 17 house dress. Colours of fabric and buttons vary according to rank; white for the Pope, red for Cardinals, purple for bishops and monsignors. Otherwise, cassocks are black.

Catechesis

The teaching of the Christian faith, given by a catechist.

Catechism

Instruction in the Christian faith, often in a question-and-answer form.

Catechist

Someone who gives instruction in the Christian faith

Catechumen

Generally, anyone receiving catechesis or are under instruction from catechists; specifically, a new convert to Christianity who is under instruction but has not yet been baptised. (see RCIA)

Canon

A priest who is selected by a bishop to run a cathedral. Canons come together as a chapter or group and are responsible for the work of the cathedral.

Canonisation

Final step in official process that declares a deceased person to be a saint and acknowledges they can be venerated by the universal Church as "an example of holiness that can be followed with confidence". Requires attribution of one further miracle after the candidate has been declared "blessed" through beatification.

Cardinal

Cleric (normally archbishop) appointed by the Pope to join the College of Cardinals - the Pope's principal advisers. When a pope dies or resigns, cardinals younger than 80 are eligible to vote for his successor in a conclave. They are often addressed as, "Your eminence".

Cathedral

The mother church of a diocese - so called because it contains the cathedra, or bishop's chair, the symbol of a bishop's authority in the area.

Chalice

From the Latin *calix* meaning "cup". A cup used for the wine which is to be consecrated at Mass.

Chasuble

From the Latin *casubla* meaning “hooded cloak”. The sixth of the *vestments* for Mass, a sleeveless garment which covers the others as a symbol of charity. It is of different colours for different seasons.

Chrism

From the Greek *khrisma* meaning “to anoint”. The mixture of oil and balsam (or similar aromatic) used for anointing in some ceremonies (baptism, confirmation, ordination, the dedication of a church). Blessed once a year by the bishop at a special Chrism Mass (usually during Holy Week).

Church

The building where people come to pray. Church with a capital C refers to the Church as a group of people, whereas church with a lower case c refers to the building.

Clergy

The body of people ordained for religious service, (deacons, priests, bishops) as opposed to laity. Religious monks, nuns, friars brothers etc are **not** clergy unless they are also ordained.

Congregation

An group of people gathered for worship

Conclave

The meeting of cardinals in the Vatican, Rome, to elect a new pope. All living cardinals are invited. Those under the age of 80 are eligible to vote. During the conclave, cardinals stay within the Vatican and are not allowed any contact with the outside world. The cardinals do not have to choose a cardinal to become pope - theoretically any baptised male Catholic can be elected pope - but usually they will almost certainly give the job to a cardinal. When the Conclave gathers, the Sistine Chapel area are sealed. While negotiations and arguments take place outside the chapel, inside it is a place for prayer and voting in silence. After each vote ballot papers and any notes taken are burned. Special chemicals are added to make the smoke white or black, with white smoke signalling the election of a pope and black indicating an inconclusive vote.

Convent

An enclosed religious house where nuns (female religious) live under a rule and dedicate themselves to prayer.

Cope

From the Latin *cappa* meaning “cloak with hood”. It is a full-length open cloak, with a hood, usually worn over a cassock and surplice for ceremonies other than Mass, such as weddings, processions and Benediction.

Corporal

From the Latin *corporale* from *corpus* meaning “body”. It is a square white cloth unfolded on the altar to hold the chalice and paten during Mass.

Corporal Works of Mercy

Seven types of actions Christians should do: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned and burying the dead.

Corpus Christi

Latin meaning “Body of Christ”.

Council (Vatican)

A meeting of bishops/Church elders to discuss doctrinal and pastoral needs of Church. The most recent example was the Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II) held in Rome during the 1960s.

Curia

Administrative structure of the Vatican; a collection of "government" departments.

Communion

The elements of bread (wafer) and wine Roman Catholics believe are converted into the body and blood of Christ (through transubstantiation) during the Eucharistic prayer of the Mass. (The High Church, or Anglo-Catholic Anglicans, also believe in what they call the "real presence" of Jesus in consecrated bread and wine.) Communion can also refer generally to a fellowship of Christians.

Deacon (part of the diaconate)

The first level of three ordained ministries (deacon, priest and bishop). Deacons assist priests and are able to baptise, marry and bury the faithful but cannot celebrate Mass to consecrate bread and wine, nor can they hear confessions. Deacons who go on to become priests are not married but married men who are ordained as permanent deacons will not go on to become priests.

Diocese

The territory, or churches, under the authority and leadership of a bishop.

Disciple

Those who accepted Jesus' message to follow him. We can be disciples. However, we cannot become apostles as these are the 12 original followers of Jesus.

1. Andrew (Brother of Peter)
2. Bartholomew or Nathanael (The apostle Jesus appeared to at the sea of Tiberias after his resurrection. He was also witness to the Ascension)
3. James, the Elder / Greater, (Son of Zebedee and other brother to John) (Has writings included in the Bible)
4. James, the Younger (Has writings included in the Bible)
5. John (Son of Zebedee and younger brother of James) (Has writings included in the Bible)
6. Judas Iscariot (later replaced by Matthias)
7. Jude or Thaddeus
8. Matthew or Levi
9. Peter or Simon Peter (Brother of Andrew) (Has writings included in the Bible)
10. Philip
11. Simon the Zealot
12. Thomas (Didymus)

Dogma/Doctrine

The revealed teachings of Christ as defined by the Church's magisterium, or teaching authority. Doctrine is what the Church believes.

Doxology

The final element of many Christian prayers, which gives praise and glory to the Trinity - God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Easter

The most important festival in the Church's calendar, marking the resurrection of Jesus Christ

Ecclesiastic/Ecclesiastical

Refers to things to do with the Church. From the Greek word ecclesia meaning “church”.

Eucharist (Holy Mass)

The ritual service of thanksgiving to God which centres on the consecration of the elements of bread and wine and their distribution at communion. One of the seven sacraments, it is the main liturgical celebration. Roman Catholics believe that the bread becomes the body of Jesus, and the wine his blood, in the process of its blessing by a priest, and that sharing it at Eucharist or Holy Communion commemorates the Last Supper shared by Jesus and his apostles, and Jesus' sacrificial death by crucifixion.

Evangelist

One of the four authors credited with writing the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). More generally, the term refers to someone who works actively to spread and promote the Christian faith.

Evangelisation

The proclamation of Christ and his Gospel. We are all called to evangelise and St Thomas More's feel that it is our role to support our community to do this, as well as evangelising ourselves. It is sometimes referred to as ‘Sharing the Good News’ and this is quite a useful way of thinking of evangelising – if something in your life is so great as Jesus’ teachings are, then surely you would want to spread the word so others can have Christ in their lives.

This must not be confused with Evangelicals - a word used to describe some Christian groups (usually Protestant, with often literalist in their interpretation of the Bible).

Excommunication

The formal process of expulsion from the Church which excludes a person from receiving the sacraments and from the exercise of any Church office, ministry, or function. Declared by Church authorities for defiance of the Church's teaching authority, or magisterium. Excommunication is not punishment for sin, the idea being that God's Grace and Mercy are always available to the sinner.

Heresy

The denial by someone who is baptised of accepted Church teaching (dogma).

Homily

A discourse which is intended primarily for spiritual education. The difference between a homily and a sermon is that "Homily" comes from the Greek "homiletikos" which means "conversation", while "sermon" comes from the Latin "sermo" meaning speech. Catholics tend to use the term homily. However, if what is being said does not directly relate to the day's gospel reading, it may be referred to as a sermon.

Holy day of Obligation

Sometimes called a Solemnity, a holy day of obligation is when you are obliged to attend mass. They denote special feast days in the Church's year. In addition to every Sunday, the Holy days of obligation are:

- Birth of the Lord (25th December)
- St Peter & St Paul (29th June)
- Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (15th August)
- All Saints (1st November)

There are also three more days which pertain to the life of Jesus. These used to be separate Holy days of obligation, but recently they were changed to being held on Sundays as they were deemed so important that the Church didn't want the days to be missed by those people who did not attend mass on these different days. These feasts are:

- Epiphany of the Lord
- Ascension of the Lord
- Body and Blood of the Lord

Holy Orders

The state of having received Christian ordination (bishop, priest, or deacon).

Immaculate Conception

Belief that Mary the mother of Jesus was born free of original sin. This is often confused with the Virgin Birth - the belief that Jesus was conceived without sexual intercourse. This is not the immaculate conception.

Laity

Collective term for lay people - ordinary members of the Church who have not received holy orders (ie are not clergy).

Lectern

The stand from which Scripture, bidding prayers and sometimes homilies are given in church.

Liturgy

General term for a religious service or ceremony performed by a group of believers. A priest does not have to be present during a liturgy if it does not include communion.

Magisterium

The teaching office of the universal Church, overseen by a pope. Papal statements which teach on a matter of faith and morals are called "magisterial pronouncements" and Catholics have to follow these. Most statements and documents of popes are not magisterial.

Mass

Celebration of the Eucharist - central sacrament of the Church which also includes a liturgy of the word and a rite of penance.

Ministry

The work of preaching the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments by those in Holy Orders or, in some cases, members of the laity. Members of the laity can also have an extraordinary ministry which helps the principal ministers (deacons, priests and bishops). This is why you may hear people talking about ministries within the church. At St Thomas More's we call children to ministries within the church such as being readers, liturgical dancers, welcomers.

Miracle

An event, commonly a physical healing, which appears to defy the laws of nature and of science. Miracles need to be "verified" before they are accepted as miracles; being inexplicable is not enough - they must also show evidence of divine power at work.

Missal

A book containing the order of services and prayers of the Mass. You can have Sunday missals or Weekday missals.

Monastery

A religious house where monks live in a community under a rule and dedicate themselves to prayer.

Monsignor

A senior clergy position.

Ordination

The service by which individuals are made deacons, priests or bishops.

Original Sin

The sin Roman Catholics believe originated from Adam and Eve disobeying God's commandment, choosing to follow their own will and introducing sin into the world. Original sin describes the subsequent fallen state of human nature.

Parish

The Christian community headed by a parish priest selected by the bishop. A number of parishes make up a diocese. St Thomas More's has three parishes but four churches:

Leigh Park Parish (St Michael and All Angels' Church)

Havant & Emsworth Parish (St Joseph's Church, Havant & Ss Thomas' Church, Emsworth)

Hayling Island Parish (St Patrick's Church)

Pastoral letter

A letter sent from a bishop to the parishes of his diocese, often read out to people at Mass.

Penance

An action which expresses contrition (remorse) for a sin following forgiveness by a priest in confession. A penance is usually a prayer or series of prayers, but may require a specific act of reparation (eg returning stolen goods).

Pope

The successor of St Peter as bishop of Rome and head of the Catholic Church. Pope Francis (who was known as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio before he became pope and was the Archbishop of Buenos Aires) is the 266th pope.

Priest

Someone who is ordained to the second level of ministry within the Church. His main duties include preaching, celebrating Mass, administering the other sacraments and carrying out the main pastoral role in a parish/community (referred to as Father with either first name (most often) or surname e.g. Father Gerard or Father Adams).

Reconciliation

One of the sacraments. This is when a person seeks forgiveness for their actions and is reconciled with God. It is sometimes called "Confession" but this can give the impression that it is all to do with naming your sins and it can be seen by some as a negative thing, where as "reconciliation" focuses on reconciling.

Relic

Any part of the physical remains of a saint or items that have touched the body of a saint. Every Catholic altar will have a relic within it - originating from the days when the early Christians celebrated Mass in the Catacombs.

Saint

Someone who, by their life and actions, is an example of holiness. The process by which the Church declares someone to be saint can only happen after their death.

There is a four-stage process each individual case has to go through before being canonised as a saint, which cannot begin until at least five years after their death.

It involves taking evidence about the individual's holiness, the scrutiny of their writings and evidence that people are drawn to holiness and prayer through the individual's example.

1. Individual can be called a "servant of God";
2. Individual is called "venerable";
3. Individual is beatified and declared "blessed" (requires a miracle attributed to the individual's intercession)
4. Individual is canonised as a saint for veneration by the universal Church (requires a further authenticated miracle)

Sacraments

The seven ceremonies that mark Catholics' religious development through life. They are Baptism, Eucharist (Communion), Reconciliation (sometimes called Confession), Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick.

Scripture

The writings of the Old and New Testaments.

Seminary

A college where men are trained for the priesthood.

Synod

A meeting of bishops to discuss doctrinal and pastoral needs of Church.

Tabernacle

The locked cabinet in a church (usually behind the altar) where the Blessed Sacrament or Holy Eucharist is "reserved". A red light indicates the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. The contents are brought out by a priest for distribution at Mass if there are insufficient hosts consecrated by him. They can be taken out at any time to take to the sick or the dying.

Triduum

The three days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. The most solemn time of the Church's year.

Vestments

Garments worn by those celebrating Mass or administering sacraments (eg alb - long white tunic; chasuble - main outer-garment; stole - type of scarf worn around the neck).

The stole is the principle symbol of ministerial authority and is worn by deacons, priests and bishops when administering the sacraments.

Vigil

The eve of a religious festival when special prayer services are held. This most usually happens for the major feasts of Easter and Christmas. However, vigil is now also sometimes used to describe the Saturday evening Mass.

Vocation

A religious calling - all Christians have a vocation to be followers of Christ in the world. However, vocation is usually used to describe vocations or callings to the priesthood or religious life.