

God's Love for You

Something is wrong with the human race. We all sense it. Things aren't the way they should be. Not in the world. Not in our neighbors. Not in ourselves.

We aren't as kind, as generous, or as loving as we should be. We do things we shouldn't. We are selfish, arrogant, sometimes even cruel. We use other people for our own ends. We fall short even of our own low standards.

The Bible has a word for this: sin.

WE CAN'T ESCAPE

Sin is a constant of the human condition. It's all around us. It's inside us, too. We are all sinners. Sometimes our sins are written large, like adultery or murder. Sometimes they are buried in a cutting glance. But they're always there.

We sense that things shouldn't be this way, that there must have been a time when things were right in the world. And there was such a time.

When God first made man, he made him perfect, able to live and love as he should, free from sin and sin's worst consequence, which is death. But our first parents turned away from God, and the human race hasn't been right since.

Sin is a violation of the way things should be, a violation of a fundamental law. That law was designed by God to make us happy. Think of how it would be if everyone in the world lived up to that law.

Unfortunately, we all turn away from God's law. In doing so, we turn away from him. If we don't come back to God, we will be separated from him forever. But we are caught in a cycle of sin. Try as we might, we can't break free. Not on our own.

THE LOVE OF GOD

God has not abandoned us, because God is love. He loves the world he made, and he loves us, broken though we are.

God loves us so much that he sent his only Son to become one of us and to save the human race.

His Son was born in the village of Bethlehem two thousand years ago. He grew up to become the most important person in history: Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the Christ.

In his ministry, Jesus traveled the hills of Galilee and Judea. He taught the word of God, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and even raised the dead. In every way, he demonstrated God's love for us and his desire to heal us spiritually as well as physically.

Jesus opened the way for us to have eternal life.

THE CROSS

For Jesus, the way was a costly one. He traveled the road of sorrows, and it ended with his death on a cross. Jesus was willing to suffer and die for us because his death would enable us to escape from our sins and to live with God forever.

Though he was God in the flesh, Jesus let himself be whipped and spat on and crowned with thorns. He let himself be crucified, with nails driven through his hands and feet. He offered his life as an act of love for us--an act so perfect, so pure, and so valuable that it paid for the sins of the whole world.

This was something only God could do. No matter what we might do to atone for our sins, we are merely finite creatures and never could pay for our offenses against the infinite holiness of God. But God could pay for them-- and, because he loves us, he did.

After the Crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead. The Resurrection serves as a sign of what is waiting for all who turn to God. One day Jesus will return, and those who have loved God will experience their own glorious resurrection, the overthrow of death, and eternal life in the love of God.

WHAT WILL YOU CHOOSE?

God respects our freedom to choose. He gave man free will, and if anyone chooses to spend eternity apart from God, he will let him do so. The question is what each of us will do. What will you choose?

Will you choose sin and separation? A life of selfishness, greed, and anger? A life of bitterness, frustration, even despair?

Or will you choose to become what you should be? Will you choose to embrace God's love (even through the carrying of your own cross), to receive his forgiveness and healing, and to live as he made you to live--the only way you can be truly happy?

If you choose the latter, you must become a follower of Christ, a Christian. To do this, you must repent of your sins, believe in Christ, and be baptized. God will enter your life and fill you with his Holy Spirit.

Part of being a Christian is belonging to Christ's Church. Jesus founded a Church to care for and guide us as we make our way through life. It is a Church full of saints and sinners, but it is also the source of grace and true teaching.

To help his Church endure, Jesus chose a leader for it: the apostle Peter. He made Peter the rock on which he built his Church, and for two thousand years the Church has been led by the popes, the successors of Peter.

Since the early centuries, this original Church has been called the Catholic Church. Catholic means "universal." The Church got this name because it was meant as the spiritual home for all men.

Over time there arose many offshoots, but you need to join the one Church that Jesus founded. He founded it for you, to take care of you and your spiritual needs, and it is the one he promised to guide and to preserve against the gates of hell.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Once you have resolved to accept God's gift through Jesus Christ, there are several things you should do.

Build your relationship with God. Think about how much he loves you and what he would want you to do in different situations. Talk to him every day through prayer. Tell him what is in your heart and how much you appreciate the good things he has given you.

Start attending your local Catholic church on Sunday. You can go other days, too, if you wish. Catholic worship is rich and beautiful. If you do not know much about Catholic worship, read *Mass Appeal: The ABCs of Worship*, a booklet published by Catholic Answers.

Join Jesus' Church. If you have been Catholic before, all you need to do is to go to confession. If you haven't yet become Catholic, your local parish will have a program to help you become part of the Church. Call your parish for information on time and place.

Learn more about the Catholic faith. Start reading the Bible and a good Catholic catechism. A catechism is a book telling you the basics of the faith, and there are many good ones. The most authoritative is called *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Get your questions answered. Your local Catholic parish can be invaluable for this. So can Catholic Answers, which has a web site that is loaded with information.

Tell others how God has blessed your life. Let them know how much he loves them and wants to bless them, too.