

The Flame of St. Francis

See the Church again—for the First Time

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"Seek the Lord in All that You Do!"

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Our Catholic Faith

by Anthony Schefter

Catholics believe that God became a man. Out of a love for humanity that passes all understanding, the Creator of the Universe became human in Mary's womb, grew up as a boy working in his foster father Joseph's carpentry shop, and then as an adult embarked upon a public ministry to proclaim the Gospel. After spending several years as an itinerant preacher, gathering disciples, working miraculous signs, and ultimately proclaiming Himself to be the God whose name is "I AM," He was persecuted by His own fellow Hebrews and crucified. On the third day, on Easter morning, He rose from the dead, appeared to many of His followers, and then ascended to Heaven where He now reigns as our intercessor, friend, and judge.

Jesus' message is called the Gospel, or the Good News. The message was then and is now that human beings are to be forgiven our sins and made whole for the sake of life in Heaven. All who accept Jesus' offer are saved through Baptism and live a life of faith, prayer, and good works in anticipation of the Lord's return, when He will judge the nations, ratify our accomplishments, and inaugurate the New Creation, a time after the end of time when the heavens and the earth, including ourselves, will be re-created to the glory God had always intended.

We live today in the Messianic age, the age of the Church, when we are seeking new disciples to follow the Lord and are cooperating in His work for peace, justice, and the revelation of the Truth that is Jesus, the light of humankind. Within the Catholic Church abides the fullness of God's truth, but other Christian Churches that practice valid Baptism are in communion with the Catholic Church to a greater or lesser degree. To everyone who is not baptized, and to everyone who is not in full communion with us, we



extend a heartfelt invitation. All are welcome in the Catholic Church.

Jesus gave His Church, which He calls His bride, seven sacraments to help humanity become holy and like Him. The first, Baptism, is the sacrament by which we are saved and begin to become holy, a process that then continues throughout our whole lives and is consummated by our final "yes" to God (and His "yes" to us) when we finally see Him face-to-face at our judgment. Baptism makes us members of the Church and members of Christ's body.

Confirmation is the sacrament that imparts to us the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit that prepare us to be Christ's hands, feet, and voice in the world. Reconciliation is the sacrament that restores us to grace when we have sinned and strengthens us in grace so that we may sin no longer. Holy Anointing is the sacrament that strengthens us, heals us, and saves us from sin when we are facing grave illness or danger of death. Marriage is the sacrament that unites a man and a woman for life and gives them the gifts they need to help each other become perfect and to raise children. Holy Orders is the sacrament

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that imparts upon a man a permanent character that makes him a deacon, priest, or bishop, able to lead the Christian community by offering intercession, sacrifice, and service.

Lastly, the Eucharist is the source and the summit of our faith; consecrated by a priest or bishop during Mass, Catholics believe that the Bread of Life we receive truly is Jesus, humanity and divinity, body and soul, given to us so that we may grow strong in spirit and prosper in doing the good works of God. The Mass is a re-presentation of Jesus' one sacrifice on Calvary; it is the sacrifice of the priest, acting in the person of Christ and united with the lay people present, of the people's lives and work to God. The Mass is a perfect expression of communion, as God returns His very Life in exchange for the sacrifice of His people.

Our human freedom allows for the possibility of rejecting God's love for us. At the end of our earthly lives we are each judged according to our deeds. If we understand that within the Church abides the fullness of Truth, and know that the Catholic Church is God's instrument of salvation, and still refuse to enter or remain in her, we place our souls in jeopardy. Even for Christians, mortal sin remains a real danger; to offend God gravely and refuse all opportunities for repentance amounts to a final rejection of His love. Hell is a radical possibility of our freedom, as is love itself, and it is a consequence of God's love for us. God desires us to love Him freely and with a whole heart, and so allows us the opposing possibility of completely rejecting Him forever. This state of self-exclusion from God's goodness brings eternal suffering that can never be relieved. But Hell does not have to happen to even a single soul. No matter one's sins, God's mercy is always available.

We are the People of God. Our mission is to be the bearers of light into the dark places of the world, and through the centuries our saints have shown us what it means to follow God and to be truly human.

We Catholics live as part of a great communion of saints, men and women on earth, in Heaven, and awaiting final purification who are all undertaking the work that God has given us. The work is nothing less than the re-creation of the universe, putting a human face that is Christ's and yours and mine on everything under the sun. We expect to be successful. Will you join us?

PRAYER CORNER

This month, September 29, brings the feast of the Archangels. Do you know the prayer to St. Michael the Archangel? It is a very powerful weapon against evil.

*Saint Michael the Archangel,
Defend us in Battle.*

*Be our protection against the wickedness
and snares of the Devil.*

*May the Lord rebuke him,
We humbly pray,*

*And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host,
Cast into Hell Satan*

And all the evil spirits

Who prowl the world seeking the ruin of souls.



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What is *The Flame of St. Francis*?

The Flame of St. Francis is an occasional e-journal of articles, prayers, apologetics, and other written words devoted to moving the reader to a deeper conversion in Christ. The purpose is to inspire, to evangelize and re-evangelize the community by showing the beauty and power of the Catholic Faith. Readers are invited to "*See the Church again—for the First Time*" through new eyes and in a way that will bring new hope. Any article that is evangelical, apologetic, or inspirational in nature is welcome to be submitted for consideration. Send all submissions to anthony@stfrancismhd.org.