

Catholic Devotions

In the Catholic Church, devotions are prayers and practices followed by believers that are not part of the liturgy. The liturgy of the Church involves formal worship, such as Mass, liturgy of the Hours, and administration of the sacraments. Most expressions of popular piety, however, fall under the category of devotions. Devotions are not considered part of liturgical worship, even if they are performed in a church or led by a priest.

Catholic devotions have various forms, ranging from formalized, multi-day prayers such as novenas, to activities which do not involve any formal prayers, such as Eucharistic adoration outside Mass, the wearing of scapulars, and the veneration of the saints. Other devotions include Stations of the cross, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pilgrimages, veneration of saintly images and other similar activities.

Devotions to Our Lord

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Sacred Heart

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in its modern form is associated with the visions of the 18th century French nun **St. Margaret Mary Alacoque**. She and her Jesuit confessor promoted the practice of a Holy Hour on the First Friday of every month in honor of the Sacred Heart and also encouraged the institution of a Feast day.

The notion of a Sacred Heart as a symbol of Christ's passion and his love of humanity existed during the Middle Ages, long before it was popularized in the 17th century. **Gertrude the Great**, **Bernard of Clairvaux**, and others saints of the Middle Ages were devoted to the **Five Wounds of Christ** and Devotion to the heart of Jesus was an outgrowth of this practice.

The mass for the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as the Immaculate heart of Mary, were written by **St. John Eudes**, a contemporary of St. Margaret Mary. He actively promoted both devotions, and a First Class feast was added to the Roman Calendar on the Third Friday after Pentecost. Eudes also founded the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (a.k.a Eudists), an apostolate dedicated to honoring the Sacred Hearts. The Jesuits have also historically been active in promoting the devotion.

The **Enthronement of the Sacred Heart** is a ceremony in which a priest consecrates the members of the household to the Sacred Heart. An image of the Sacred Heart is then placed in the home as a reminder. The practice of the Enthronement is based upon Pius XII's declaration that devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is "the foundation on which to build the kingdom of God . . ."

Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross devotion, also known as the "Way of Sorrows" evolved from the re-enactment of Jesus's walk to Calvary by pilgrims in Jerusalem during the Crusades. Eventually the practice in the Holy Land came under control of the newly formed Franciscan order, and it was the Franciscans who established the practice in Europe during 15th and 16th century. At first the Franciscans built simple, outdoor shrines along a route, and the number of stations varied.

It was not until 1685 that the Pope granted the Franciscans the right to build stations within their own churches for public worship. The devotion was so popular that fifty years later the right to establish stations was extended to all churches, and the number of stations was fixed at 14. The Fourteen authorized stations of the Cross are as follows:

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus carries His cross
3. Jesus falls for the first time
4. Jesus meets His mother, Mary
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls for the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls for the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of His clothes
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

In modern times, the Stations are commonly prayed on the Fridays of Lent, and there are a number of fixed prayers associated with them. The hymn most closely associated with Stations of the Cross is **Stabat Mater** and it has been set to music by many brilliant composers.

Holy Name of Jesus

Although Christians have always revered the name of Jesus, the modern devotion to the Holy Name originated in the 15th century with **St. Bernadino of Sienna**. He preached devotion to the Holy Name and popularized the Christogram of IHS, supposedly representing the first three letters of Jesus name as spelled in Greek (Iota-Eta-Sigma). St. Bernardino is also credited with writing the [Litany of the Holy Name](#), along with his associate **John of Capistrano**. He also devised the symbol of the IHS Christogram written within the image of a burning sun that was later adopted as the logo of the **Jesuit** Order. The Jesuits

The Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus was first celebrated by the Franciscans and made Universal in the 18th century. It was originally celebrated January 1st in conjunction with the Feast of the Circumcision but was later moved to the First Sunday after January 1st. The Jesuits celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name on January 3rd as their titular feast day. The Symbol most closely associated with devotion to the Holy Name remains the IHS Christogram, within a circle.

Holy Family

A Catholic Devotion to the Holy family did not arise until the 17th century, and its original promoters were mainly in France and the Canadian colony of New France. The Saint credited with encouraging the devotion in his realm was **Francois de Laval**, the first bishop of New France. By the mid 1600s, confraternities under the patronage of the Holy Family had been established in both France and Canada. The Initials J.M.J. for Jesus-Mary-Joseph are traditionally used to refer to the patronage of the Holy Family, especially in correspondence.

Five Holy Wounds

Devotions to the Five Holy wounds of Christ were more common in the Middle Ages. Devotion to the Sacred Heart has been historically associated with Devotions to the Five Wounds, which have been depicted in art. Like Stations of the Cross and the Sorrowful Mysteries, devotions to the Five Holy Wounds is associated with the contemplation of Christ's passion. Symbols and devotions associated with the Five Wounds of Christ include:

- The [Chaplet of the Five Wounds of Jesus](#) was written by **Alphonus Ligouri** and is prayed by the Redemptorist Order.
- The **Jerusalem Cross** is said to represent the Five Wounds of Christ.
- The Five Wounds of Christ were the Emblem of the **Pilgrimage of Grace**, a large rebellion that occurred in England after Henry VIII closed the monasteries.
- The **Stigmata**, experienced by such mystical saints as **St. Francis of Assisi** and **Padre Pio** is a reflection of the Five wounds.

Divine Mercy

Divine Mercy is a recent Devotion, based on the visions of a 20th century Polish Nun, **Faustina Kowalska**. In the year 2000 John Paul II canonized St. Faustina and declared the Sunday after Easter (formerly "Low Sunday") would henceforth be Divine Mercy Sunday. In addition to the Liturgical Feast of the Divine Mercy, there are three other related devotions.

- The **Divine Mercy Chaplet** is a set of prayer that uses the regular Dominican Rosary, but instead of a Hail Mary, the prayer "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world" is said for each small bead.
- The **Image of Merciful Jesus** is a painting of Jesus based on the Visions of St. Faustina. In her visions Jesus promised blessings to those who venerate the image.
- In Faustina's visions, Jesus also name 3 pm as the **Hour of Mercy** and recommended praying for sinners and meditating on his passion at that time.

Christ the King

Celebration of Christ the King is a 20th century that was instituted by Pius XI shortly after the First World War. The Feast of Christ the King was originally assigned to the last Sunday in October, but with the 1969 changes to the Calendar, was moved to the last Sunday in Ordinary time.

The most notable devotion associated with Christ the King is a Eucharistic procession. However, the popularity of Christ the King processions declined when the Feast day was moved to late November.

Eucharistic Adoration

Eucharistic Adoration involves prayers and meditation in the presence of the Eucharist and can occur when the Host is exposed in a Monstrance, or when it is enclosed in a tabernacle.

Eucharistic Adoration outside of mass is one of the most popular and long-standing devotions in the Catholic Church. It was not unheard of before the 13th century, but became much more popular in the 13th century after Pope Urban IV instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi. The devotion was promoted by **Juliana of Liege** and **Thomas Aquinas** wrote a number of famous hymns for the feast. Various forms of Eucharistic Adoration developed afterward.

- **Holy Hour** — The inspiration for the Holy Hour is Matthew 26:40, during the agony in the Garden when Jesus asked his disciples to remain and keep watch with him. "So, could you men not keep watch with me for an hour?". Holy Hour is frequently followed by **Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament**.
- **Forty Hours Devotion** — This Eucharistic devotion originated in Milan in 1530 and was promoted by both the Jesuits and Philip Neri's Oratory during the 16th century. Forty hours is thought to be the number of hours that Jesus was entombed from the time he was taken from the Cross to his Resurrection Easter morning. For that reason the Devotion usually begins with an afternoon or Evening Mass of Exposition, and ends with a Morning mass two days later.
- **Perpetual Adoration** — Perpetual adoration is a practice that is commonly practiced in Monasteries or religious communities where it is practical to have congregants commit to continuous worship over a long period of time. Once the Eucharist is exposed it can never be left alone, so worshippers must arrange a schedule of permanent worship. Perpetual Adoration is usually paused during the Easter Triduum.
- **Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament** — This ceremony begins with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and consists of adoration, prayers, hymns (usually Tantum Ergo), a blessing and recitation of the Blessed Sacrament. It ends when the Eucharist is restored to the Tabernacle. The vestments typically worn by the priest during Benediction include a Cope and Humeral Veil.
 - **Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament** — A ceremony that involves placing the consecrated host in a monstrance and placing it on the altar for the purpose of adoration.
 - **Divine Praises** — A prayer, also known as "Blessed Be to God", that is traditionally said during Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.
 - **Tantum Ergo** — A hymn, composed by Thomas Aquinas for the Feast of Corpus Christi, that is traditionally sung during Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Precious Blood

Devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ was most active in Flanders during the Middle Ages, do to a famous relic in Burges. There a special procession of the Holy Blood has taken place yearly since the Middle Ages.

A Feast dedicated to the Precious Blood was celebrated in both Spain and Italy as far back as the 16th century, but the it was not added to the Roman calendar until 1849 when it was assigned the date of July 1st. It was in the Roman calendar until the revisions of 1970. Other devotions to the Precious Book include the **Holy Blood Prayer** and the [Litany of the Precious Blood](#)

Novenas

A Novena is a traditional devotion consisting of private or public prayers repeated for nine successive days. During a novena, the faithful make petitions and obtain graces by worshiping Jesus Christ and asking for intercessions from the saints. Most novenas fall into one of the following categories:

- Mourning, anticipation of burial, [Souls in Purgatory](#)
- Anticipating Church feast, ending in Vespers the night before: ([Christmas Novena](#), [Novena to the Holy Spirit for Pentecost](#))
- Group petition for a specific request: ([St. Jude's Novena](#) for desperate cases, [Our Lady of Perpetual Help Novena](#))
- Prayers to patron Saints, beginning nine days before their feast day: ([Novena to St. Therese](#), [Novena to St. Joseph](#))
- Indulgence for remission of sins. . . requires confession and Eucharist.

Litanies

Litanies are prayers consisting of a series of petitions and responses. Although they are traditionally used in church services, they can also be prayed in private devotions, and may be sung. The word "litany" comes from the Greek word for "supplication."

When a litany is prayed in public, one person recites the first part of the prayer, and the congregation responds. Litanies have their roots in the pre-Christian era when Jews used this responsive pattern in public worship. The practice increased in complexity over the centuries and by the 17th century, there were dozens of versions of many popular liturgies.

It was then, in 1601, that Pope Clement VIII officially forbade public recitation unauthorized litanies, and only allowed Litany of the Saints and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary to be recited in public. Later four additional liturgies were approved for public worship in Churches. However, many other liturgies are still popular, and can be prayed privately. The six most common approved Catholic litanies are as follows:

- [Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#) (Litany of Loreto)
- [Litany of the Saints](#)
- [Litany of St. Joseph](#)
- [Litany of the Sacred Heart](#)
- [Litany of the Precious Blood](#)
- [Litany of the Holy Name](#)

In the Eastern church, Litanies are called **Ektenias** and many are incorporated into the Divine Liturgy.

Chaplets

A chaplet is a form of prayer that uses prayer beads. Each bead represents a certain prayer, and the beads are usually grouped in a way that is meaningful for the subject of the prayer.

The Chaplet most familiar to Catholics is the Dominican Rosary, that consists of a string of 50 beads in groups of 10. Other chaplets, however, have different compositions. Some of the more common chaplets are listed below.

- The [Chaplet of the Divine Mercy](#), uses the ordinary Dominican rosary of five decades.
- The [Chaplet of the Five Wounds of Jesus](#) is a devotional prayer written by Alphonsus Ligouri using the ordinary five decade Rosary.
- The [Chaplet \(Little Crown\) of the Holy Child Jesus](#) (Infant of Prague), made up of three and twelve beads.
- The [Chaplet of the Sacred Heart](#) consists of 33 small beads, 6 large beads, a centerpiece, a Crucifix and a Sacred Heart Medal.
- The [Chaplet of the Precious Blood](#) consists of thirty-three beads in seven groups.
- The **Chaplet of the Immaculate Conception, also called the Crown of Stars** consists of 3 groups of 4 beads, with a medal of the Immaculate Conception.
- The [Chaplet or Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of Mary](#) consists of seven groups of seven beads. Also known as the Dolour beads.
- The [Chaplet of Saint Joseph](#) is divided into 15 groups of four beads consisting of one white and three purple beads.
- The **Chaplet of Saint Patrick** consists of twelve beads symbolizing the twelve perils of St. Patrick.
- The **Bridgettine Rosary** consists of six decades of ten beads each. There are three additional beads at the end.

- The **Chaplet of the Way of the Cross** consists of fifteen groups of three beads, etc.
- The [Chaplet of Saint Michael the Archangel](#) comprising nine groups of four beads each, consisting of three Hail Marys and one Our Father in each. (Each of the nine groups is said in honor of one of the nine choirs of angels.)

Devotional Scapulars

While full size scapulars are garments associated with the religious habit of certain orders of monks and nuns, most devotional scapulars consist only of two small rectangular pieces of cloth, attached with cords that can be worn around the neck. They are objects of popular piety intended to show the wearers devotion to a confraternity, or to an aspect of the life of Jesus or Mary. The blessings attached to particular scapulars are usually associated with visions of monks or nuns with devotion to a particular religious order or cause.

- **Brown Scapular of the Carmelites** (1250) — The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to St. Simon Stock, a Carmelite monk in England, in answer to his prayers. She recommended the Brown Scapular of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel to him and promised salvation for the faithful who wore it piously. The brown scapular is the habit of the Carmelite Order.
- **Green Scapular of Daughters of St. Vincent** (1863) — The green scapular, based on the visions of a Vincentian nun, may be worn, carried, or placed under a pillow or other object. Its special grace is for spiritual conversion of those who have fallen away from the faith.
- **Blue Scapular of the Immaculate Conception** (1671)— Venerable Ursula Benicasa experienced a vision in which Jesus promised favors for her religious order to such people who honored the Immaculate Conception by wearing a blue scapular and live chastely according to their station in life,
- **Black Scapular of the Seven Sorrows** (1255) — The Black scapular, dedicated to the Seven Sorrows of Mary, was adopted by the Servite Order in the 13th century.
- **White Scapular of the Holy Trinity** (1193)
- **Red Scapular of the Passion (or Precious Blood)** (1846)

Processions

A Christian procession is an organized body of the faithful walking in a formal and ceremonial manner. Common forms are **Eucharistic processions**, where the Blessed Sacrament is carried in a monstrance, and **Marian Processions**, where a statue of Mary is elevated and honored at the head of the procession. However, there are many other types of processions. Crucifixes, Candles, palms, images of saints, flowers, and fruits of the harvest are some of the items that can be carried in Christian processions.

Some processions, such as on Palm Sunday, or May crowning, process only around the boundaries of the parish itself. Other processions, such as Corpus Christi or Christ the king, are intended to be public, and typically process through the neighborhood of a Church or Cathedral. Participants typically sing hymns or pray chaplets, litanies, or other well-known prayers during the procession.

- Eucharistic Processions: **Christ the King** and **Corpus Christi**.
- Marian Processions: **Immaculate Conception**, **May Crowning**, **Marian Shrines**
- Easter Processions: **Psalm Sunday**, **Easter Vigil**
- Saint Processions: **All Saints**, or **Patron Saints** of towns, parishes, or religious orders.
- Funeral Processions: Seasonal Processions: **Rogation Days** in the Spring.