

A Simple  
**Glossary** of  
Catholic Terms

Revised and Expanded



Fr Jerome Bertram &  
Dr Raymond Edwards

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by

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## A Simple Glossary of Catholic Terms

The Catholic Church uses a lot of special words and phrases which have a clear meaning to Catholics, or to most of them, but can be puzzling to others. This word-list is intended to explain some of these words and usages. It is not meant as a substitute for the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, or for theological and Scriptural dictionaries, although inevitably some terms used in theology are included; but it might help clear up confusion. Words relating to the Church of the past have also been included, because even if the things they describe (like *Prime* or *maniples*) are at present not in use, readers will benefit from a degree of completeness especially if reading older books or accounts of older events. Obviously, no booklet this size can pretend to be comprehensive; but we have tried to include all the obvious words, and also some others of particular interest. It is meant to be not primarily a glossary of “hard words” but of commonly used terms. There are some words (*apocrypha*, *attrition*, *chapter*, *fraction*) which have a meaning in general usage that differs from the special sense they bear for Catholics. These too have been covered. Some Catholic expressions (*devil’s advocate*, *moveable feast*) have passed, modified, into general usage; their original meaning is given below.

Headwords are given in **bold**; where this might be helpful, or interesting, etymologies are then given in brackets, with cognates in *ITALIC CAPITALS*; words within definitions that occur elsewhere in this glossary are given in *italics*.

## A

**Abba** (Aramaic, “father”) Familiar name used by Jesus for God, his Father; later the affectionate title given to senior *monks* in Egypt; from this derives **Abbot**, the superior of a *monastery* of men, and **Abbess**, the equivalent for women. In either case the monastery can be called an **Abbey**.

**Absolution** (Latin *ABSOLUTIO*, from *ABSOLVO*, “set free”) The solemn pronouncement by a *priest* in the *Sacrament of Penance (Confession)* that someone’s sins are forgiven.

**Abstinence** (Latin *ABSTINENTIA*, from *ABSTINEO*, “hold back, refrain”) Not eating meat; a form of *penance* now obligatory in England and Wales only on *Ash Wednesday* and *Good Friday*, and binding only on those between the ages of 14 and 65. In the past, Catholics were bound to abstain from meat on every Friday throughout the year. In some countries this is still the custom. Eating fish instead of meat on days of abstinence is a traditional, not obligatory, practice, one which finds Scriptural support in John 21:9-14.

**Acolyte** (Greek *AKOLUTES*, “follower”) Originally, the fourth grade of *Holy Orders*, now suspended in the Latin Church. Now used for a lay ministry, assistant to the *priest*, hardly ever conferred except for those on the way to *ordination* as *deacon* or *priest*. Also used more loosely to refer to those who serve at *Mass*.

**Act** A movement of the will and heart towards God, hence an impulse in *prayer*. Specifically acts can mean short prayers designed to express the will to some virtue, most commonly an *Act of Contrition*; Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity are also found in prayer-books.

**Ad limina** (Latin, “to the threshold [of the Apostles]”) Technical term for the regular visits (usually every five years) made by diocesan *bishops* to the *Holy See*.

**Adoration** Worship directed to God; often especially used in the phrase *Eucharistic Adoration*.

**Advent** (Latin *ADVENTUS*, “arrival”) The season before *Christmas*, celebrating the coming of Christ to earth at Bethlehem, and in the *Church*, and looking forward to the *Parousia*; traditionally a time of *penance*.

**Agape** (Greek, “brotherly love, charity”) A technical term for the unselfish love the Christian is enabled to have towards God and neighbour, modelled on the complete self-giving of the *Holy Trinity*; also, in the *New Testament* and *Church Fathers*, a “love feast” (shared meal) that accompanied or followed the *Eucharist*.

**Agnus Dei** (Latin, “lamb of God”) A text (referring to Jesus as the true *Passover* sacrifice) used just before *Communion* at *Mass*, to coincide with the *fraction*, often set to music.

**Alb** (Latin [*TUNICA* or *VESTIS*] *ALBA*, “white garment”) The second of the *vestments* for *Mass*, a full-length sleeved white gown. Sometimes also worn by those serving *Mass*.

**Alleluia** (Hebrew, “praise God!”) An interjection found frequently in *Scripture* and the *liturgy*; hence, **Alleluia verse**, a joyous chant sung just before the *Gospel* at *Mass*, except during *Lent*. The spelling Hallelujah attempts to be closer to the Hebrew pronunciation of the word, and is characteristic of Protestant usage.

**All Saints** A *Solemnity* on 1st November each year to commemorate the countless saints, known and unknown, who have no particular *feast-day*. Formerly called All Hallows (Old English *HĀLGA*, “saint”). The vigil of the feast, October 31st, was known as Halloween (All Hallows’ Eve). Once a pre-Christian pagan festival, it has since become a secular event of no religious significance.

**All Souls** A commemoration on 2nd November of all those who have died, when the Christian has a particular duty to pray for their souls.

**Almsgiving** Practical charitable donations to those in need, of either money or goods.

**Almuce** (Medieval Latin *ALMUCIA*) A *mozzetta*; sometimes explained as a Middle English variant of the word *amice*, although this is unclear.

**Altar** (Latin *ALTARE*, *ALTARIUM*, sg. of *ALTARIA* “burnt offerings”, prob from *ADOLERE* “burn in sacrifice”. The frequently supposed connexion with *ALTUS* “high” is factitious) 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*.

**Altar-bread** Unleavened bread, often in the form of wafers, used for the *Eucharist*.

**Altar Missal**, see *Missal*, *Sacramentary*.

**Altar-rails** Low railings of metal, stone or wood, found in some churches, serving to demarcate the *sanctuary*, and to provide support for those kneeling to receive *Communion*.

**Altar of Repose** A *side altar*, or a specially constructed occasional altar, decorated to serve as a place of reservation of the *Blessed Sacrament* for the evening of *Maundy Thursday*.

**Ambo** (Greek *AMBON*, “pulpit”, perhaps from *ANABAINO*, “go up steps”) A raised platform in the *sanctuary* where the *Gospel* is proclaimed; also sometimes used for preaching from. Originally a term from the Greek-speaking Church of the East. See also *Lectern*.

**Amice** (Latin *AMICTUS*, “cloak”, or medieval Latin *AMICIA*) The first of the *vestments* for *Mass*, a neck-cloth to keep the *alb* clean and cover the priest’s collar. See *almuce*.

**Anamnesis** (Greek, “calling to mind, remembrance”) New Testament term describing the narrative parts of the *Eucharistic Prayer*, which make present the Last Supper and the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary.

**Anastasis** (Greek, “raising up, resurrection”) The Resurrection; also, the name of the original Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

**Anaphora** (Greek, “offering, lifting up”) Another name for the *Eucharistic Prayer*.

**Anathema** (Greek, “an accursed thing”) Historically, a term used by *ecumenical councils* to describe *heresies* formally condemned.

**Anchorites** (Medieval Latin *ANCHORITA*, Greek *ANAKHŌRETES* from *ANAKHOREIN*, “to retire, withdraw”) Those who live lives of complete solitude devoted to prayer, remaining in a single place for life. (Now rare.)

**Angel** (Greek, *ANGELOS*, “messenger”) A pure spirit, created by God to praise and worship Him; some have the particular mission of being intermediary between God and man. Traditionally divided into nine orders or hierarchies (*angels*, *archangels*, virtues, dominations, principalities, powers, thrones, *cherubim*, *seraphim*) although these categories are not a *dogma*. See *Archangel*, *Guardian Angel*, *cherub*, *seraph*.

**Angelus** (Latin “angel”) A prayer commemorating the *annunciation* by the *angel* Gabriel to Mary, traditionally said at six in the morning, midday and six in the evening; hence the **Angelus Bell** which is rung at those times.

**Anima Christi** (Latin, “soul of Christ”) A traditional prayer, of medieval date, famously used by St Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises*.

**Annulment** A declaration by the *Church* that a particular marriage never in fact took place, owing to a previously undeclared defect of form or intention.

**Annunciation** (Latin *ANNUNTIATIO* from *ANNUNTIO*, “announce”) A *Solemnity* on 25th March to commemorate the announcement of the Angel to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus (Lk 1:26-38); during Christian times was kept as the first day of the year; known in England as *Lady Day*.

**Anointing** Smearing blessed oil on the skin, usually on the forehead, as a sign of healing and strengthening. 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, and may be repeated.

**Antiphon** (Greek *ANTI*, “opposite”, *PHONÉ*, “sound, voice”) A verse usually derived from *Scripture*, sung or said before and after every *psalm* and *canticle* in the *Divine Office*, varying according to the day and season. Hence **Antiphonale**, a book containing the chants for the antiphons and the rest of the *Office*.

**Apocalypse** (Greek, *APOKALUPSIS*, “revelation”) A text recording a vision or figurative prophecy, often of the End Times; without further qualification, it generally refers to the Scriptural Book of Revelation of St John.

**Apocrypha** (Greek *APOKRUPHA*, “things hidden or concealed” from *APOKRUPTO*, “to hide from view, conceal”) Jewish and early Christian books omitted from the *Canon of Scripture*. (i) In Catholic usage, the apocrypha (or **apocryphal books**) means various texts (Enoch, Jubilees, the Shepherd of Hermas amongst many others) of varied provenance which are not accepted in any version of the Bible; (ii) in Protestant usage, the apocrypha (sometimes called the Deuterocanonical books) refers to a number of books and parts of books (Maccabees, Wisdom, Judith, parts of Daniel and others) found in the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles but omitted for various reasons by Protestant Bibles from the sixteenth century onwards, or included only as an appendix.

**Apologetics** Reasoned defence of the truths of the Faith, especially against the arguments of objectors. Cf 1 P 3:15.

**Apostasy** (Greek, *APOSTASIS*, “defection”; *APOSTATES*, “deserter”) Deliberate formal rejection of the Catholic faith; one who so rejects the faith is an **apostate**.

**Apostle** (Greek, *APOSTOLOS*, “messenger, envoy” from *APOSTELLO*, “I send”) One of the twelve men chosen from amongst Jesus’s *disciples* to be his particular representatives, especially after the *Ascension*. Whilst all Apostles are disciples, not all disciples are Apostles. See *Disciple*.

**Apostolic Delegate** The diplomatic representative of the *Holy See* to a particular sovereign state. See *Nuncio*.

**Apostolic Succession** The *doctrine* that the line of *bishops* (and thus of *priests*) descends in an unbroken chain from the *Apostles*.

**Apostolic Tradition** The *Church’s* belief that the faith she passes on comes down from the *Apostles* in an unbroken succession guaranteed by the *Holy Spirit*; and that the *Scriptures* can only properly be proclaimed and interpreted within the Church. Although the words and formulae used to express the Church’s faith have often been refined and developed over time, Apostolic Tradition means that this fullness of belief is already latent from the very earliest Christian times, being entrusted to the Apostles and their successors by Jesus Christ himself.

**Archangel** A chief or ruling angel. Three archangels are named in Scripture: Michael, Raphael, Gabriel. Other supposed archangels are named in *apocryphal* writings, but these form no part of the Christian faith.

**Archbishop** The *bishop* of an important *diocese* who acts as leader of a group of dioceses or Province; Also known as a *metropolitan*.

**Archdeacon** Originally, the senior *deacon* of a *diocese* often delegated by the *bishop* to represent him; these functions are now exercised by the *vicar general*. Retained as an honorific title for some European cathedral *clergy*, and amongst Anglicans.

**Archdiocese** A *diocese* governed by an *Archbishop*.

**Archpriest** A title sometimes given to a senior *priest* (*dean*) at a *cathedral*; historically, a priest with authority over other priests in the absence of a *bishop*.

**Ascension** The event when Jesus “withdrew from them [his apostles] and was carried up to heaven” some time after his resurrection (Ac 1:6-11). **Ascension Thursday**, forty days after *Easter*, is the *Solemnity* commemorating this.

**Ashes** The dust of burnt palms often mixed with water and smeared on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of accepting *penance* at the beginning of *Lent*. Hence **Ash Wednesday**, the first day of *Lent*, six and a half weeks before *Easter*.

**Asperges** (Latin, “You will sprinkle”) A chant accompanying the sprinkling of the *congregation* with *holy water* at the start of a traditional *High Mass*; often used as a shorthand term for this ceremony at Mass on Sundays or *feast-days*.

**Aspergillum** (Latin, “holy water sprinkler”) Something used to sprinkle *holy water*: a sprig of greenery, a brush, or a metal dispenser.

**Assumption** The *dogma* that the *Virgin Mary* was assumed bodily into heaven at the end of her earthly life, traditionally at Ephesus in Asia Minor: a sign and promise that our own redemption will also be bodily; commemorated by a *Solemnity* on 15th August.

**Attrition** (Latin *ATTRITIO*, from *ATTERO* “wear away”) Sorrow for sins arising from fear of punishment. See *Contrition*.

**Augustinians** Members of a family of *friars* and *nuns* inspired by the example of St Augustine; also most communities of *Canons Regular* following a Rule based on St Augustine’s writings.

**Auxiliary Bishop** A *bishop* appointed to assist the principal bishop of an especially large *diocese*. See *Co-Adjutor*.

**Ave Maria** (Latin, “Hail, Mary”) See *Hail Mary*.

## B

**Baldacchino** (Italian, “from Baghdad”, traditionally the source of richly embroidered fabrics: hence “canopy”, originally made of such fabric) Architectural term for a stone-built canopy over an *altar*, often curtained around. Also called a *Ciborium*.

**Baptism** (Greek *BAPTISMOS*, from *BAPTIZO*, “dip, immerse”) Dipping water and pouring it over the head, or immersing the person in water: the *sacrament* by which *catechumens* are incorporated into the life of the *Church*, die to their old nature, and are reborn in Christ. The Church baptizes babies on the understanding that their parents and *godparents* undertake the duty of handing on faith to them.

**Baptism of the Lord** A *Solemnity* kept on the Sunday after *Epiphany* to commemorate the *baptism* of Jesus in the Jordan.

**Baptistery** The area of a *church* used for *baptism*, containing the *font*; often a demarcated space near the main door.

**Basil, Liturgy of Saint** One of the three Eucharistic liturgies commonly used by the *Orthodox Church*.

**Basilica** (Late Latin, from Greek *BASILIKE*, “a royal building, palace” from *BASILEUS*, “king”) Originally, a large public hall like the audience chamber of a royal palace. Many such were used as *churches* from the fourth century onwards. Some older or especially notable newer churches retain, or have been granted, the honorific title of basilica.

**Beatification** An official declaration by the *Church* that a particular man or woman, who has lived a life of heroic Christian virtue and to whose intercession a posthumous miracle has been attributed, may be publicly venerated (at *Mass*, with readings for the *Divine Office* etc) in a particular country or region, and should now be titled “*Blessed*”. See *Canonization*.

**Beatitudes** (Latin, *BEATITUDO*, “happiness” from *BEATUS*, “happy, blessed”) (i) The eight sayings of Jesus explaining the nature of true happiness (see Mt 5:3-10); (ii) in the singular, the happiness of the *saints* in heaven.

**Benedicite** (Latin, “bless ye”) See *Canticle of Daniel*.

**Benedictines** *Monks* and *nuns* following the Rule of St Benedict, usually wearing black.

**Benediction** (Latin *BENEDICTIO*, “blessing”) A service of worship centred around the *Blessed Sacrament*, exposed on the *altar* in a *monstrance*; may be accompanied by hymns, silent prayer, *Scripture* reading or the *Divine Office*.

**Benedictus** (Latin, “blessed”) (i) The Canticle of Zechariah (Lk 1:68-79), used at *Lauds*; (ii) the second half of the *Sanctus*, sometimes detached and set to music separately.

**Bidding Prayers** (Old English *BIDDAN*, “to ask, entreat”) Term used in England for the *Prayer of the Faithful*, intercessions made after the *sermon* at *Mass*.

**Biretta** (Italian *BERETTA*, Spanish *BIRETA*, from medieval Latin *BIRETTUM*, “cap”, diminutive of late Latin *BIRRUS*, “hooded cape”) A square stiff cap with three wings on top, formerly worn by *clergy* in the *sanctuary* (it is not street dress); red for *cardinals*, purple for *prelates*, black for others; now rare. *Secular* clergy have a pom-pom on top of it. To be distinguished from **Beretta**, a make of Italian handgun.

**Bishop** (Old English *BISCOP*, from vulgar Latin *\*(E)BISCOBUS*, aphetic form of *EPISCOPUS*, Greek *EPISKOPOS*, “overseer”) A *priest* chosen and consecrated or ordained to administer a *diocese*, and to confer *confirmation* and *ordination*.

**Bishops’ Conference** Originally a meeting of all the *bishops* of a particular nation or region; now generally refers to the bureaucratic structures originally established to support these meetings and subsequent co-ordinated action by bishops but which now operate with some degree of autonomy.

**Blackfriars** Traditional English name for *Dominican friars*.

**Blessed** See *beatification*.

**Blessed Sacrament** Generally, the *Eucharist*; particularly used to refer to the consecrated *Host* reserved as a focus for devotion - such as *contemplative prayer* before the *Tabernacle*, in processions, at *Benediction* and so on.

**Blessed Virgin Mary** See *Our Lady*.

**Breviary** (Latin *BREVIARIUM*, “summary, abridgement”) A book containing all the texts for the *Divine Office*.

**Bull** (Latin *BULLA*, “seal”) A formal document from the *Pope* making a declaration of some importance, sealed with a lead seal.

**Burse** (French *BOURSE*, Latin *BURSA*, “purse”) A square fabric-covered container for the *corporal*, not now always used, but if it is, it should match the *chalice-veil* and *chasuble*.

## C

**Camaldolese** (from Camaldoli in Italy, its place of foundation) An order of *monks* living strictly as *hermits* within a community, founded by St Romuald.

**Candlemas** Traditional English name for the feast of the *Purification* of Mary, or the *Presentation of the Lord*, on 2nd February. Patronal feast of Oriel College, Oxford.

**Canon** (Greek *KANON*, “rule”) (i) A decree on some matter of *Church* order or discipline passed by the *Pope* or a *General Council* which is binding on the Church unless revoked by the same authority, collected into the **Code of Canon Law**, and

interpreted by **Canon Lawyers**; (ii) derived from the above, originally a man whose way of life is regulated by the canons, hence one of a community of *priests*; later divided into **Canons Regular** who take vows and live almost like *monks*, and **Canons Secular** who can own their own property. These formed communities at *cathedrals*, so that the title Canon came to mean one of the senior cathedral *clergy*, now often given as an honorary title; (iii) the central prayer of the *Mass*, or *Eucharistic Prayer*; (iv) **Canon of Scripture**, the complete list of 72 (or 73 if Jeremiah and Lamentations are counted as two) books included in sacred *Scripture* by the *Apostolic Tradition*.

**Canonization** An *infallible* declaration by the *Pope* that a particular Christian who has previously been *beatified* is worthy of universal veneration as a *saint*; for this, evidence of a second posthumous miracle is required. See *beatification*.

**Canopy** (Latin *CANOPEUM*, *CONOPEUM*, “mosquito net” from Greek *KONOPEION*, “bed fitted with mosquito nets”) A fabric shade carried on four poles over the *Blessed Sacrament* during outdoor *processions*, e.g. on *Corpus Christi*.

**Canticle** (Latin *CANTICULUM*, diminutive of *CANTICUM*, “chant”) Short verse-like passages from *Scripture* found together with *psalms* in the *Divine Office*.

**Canticle of Daniel** In full, the Song of the Three Young Men from the Book of Daniel (Dn 3:52-90); in common usage, either of two extracts from it used at Sunday *Lauds*: the longer (Dn 3:57-88, 56 also called the *Benedicite*) and the shorter (Dn 3:52-57) are found on alternate Sundays.

**Cantor** (Latin, “singer”) Originally one of the minor *Holy Orders* conferring a particular responsibility for singing during the *liturgy*; now typically used to refer to *lay people* with this responsibility.

**Cardinal** (Latin *CARDINALIS* [from *CARDO*, “hinge”], “attached [to a particular church] like a hinge to a door”) A senior dignitary of the *Church*, one of the College who elect a new *Pope* after the death of his predecessor. Technically they do this as senior *clergy* of the Diocese of Rome electing their *bishop*; for this reason each Cardinal is assigned a titular church within the Diocese of Rome. Cardinals are now usually *Archbishops*, either resident in Rome and working within the *Curia*, or governing their *dioceses* throughout the world.

**Cardinal Virtues** Prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

**Carmelites** Members of a large family of *friars* and *nuns* inspired by the example of the early hermits on Mount Carmel in Palestine, and the Prophet Elijah, with a strong tradition of *prayer*. The friars were known in England as *Whitefriars* because of the white outer cloaks they wear in public.

**Carthusians** (Latin *CARTHUSIANUS*, “a man of Chartreuse”) An order of *monks* and *nuns* founded by St Bruno, living strictly as *hermits* but within a community. See *Charterhouse*.

**Cassock** (French *CASAQUE*, Italian *CASACCA*, “type of long coat” from Turkish *QUZZAK*, *KAZAK* Russian *KOZAK*, *KAZAK*, “nomad, vagabond, cossack” thence transf. to the type of riding-coat worn by them) A full-length sleeved garment, buttoned down the front, worn as the foundation garment for *vestments*, and in many religious communities as the ordinary

house dress. May be girded with a *fascia*. Colours of fabric, buttons and fascia vary according to rank; white for the *Pope*, red for *Cardinals*, purple for *bishops* and *monsignors*; otherwise black. Also called a *soutane*.

**Catechesis** Oral teaching of the Christian faith, given by a *catechist*.

**Catechism** A systematic body of instruction in the Christian faith, often in a question-and-answer form.

**Catechist** One who gives oral instruction in the Christian faith (“catechizes”, from Greek *KATAKHIZEIN*, *KATAKHEIN*, “to instruct orally”) or *catechesis*.

**Catechumen** Generally, anyone receiving *catechesis* or under instruction from *catechists*; specifically, a new convert to Christianity who is under instruction but has not yet been *baptized*. Hence **Catechumenate**, the period of instruction for new Christians, in the early *Church* often extended over months or years but now typically much briefer (see *RCIA*).

**Catenians** (Latin *CATENA*, “chain”) An association of Catholic men (often working in the professions or in business) and their wives, who meet for mutual support, *prayer*, and charitable purposes. It was founded in Manchester in 1908, and counts 11,000 members worldwide.

**Cathedral** (Latin *CATHEDRALIS* (adj) from Greek *KATHEDRA*, “seat”) The mother *church* of a *diocese* where the *bishop* takes his seat; usually but not necessarily a large church. Originally an abbreviation for **Cathedral Church**.

**Catholic Truth Society** An independent Catholic charity and publisher founded in 1868 to promote the understanding and practice of the faith.

**Catholic Womens' League (CWL)** An association of women devoted to *evangelization* and practical works of charity.

**Celibacy** (Latin *CÆLIBATUS* from *CÆLEBS*, “bachelor”) Strictly, the state of not (yet) being married, but by extension the condition of *priests, monks, friars* and *nuns*, and all who are committed to remaining unmarried.

**Cenacle** (Latin *CENACULUM*, “supper room”) Name for the room in Jerusalem where, by tradition, Jesus and his *disciples* ate the Last Supper.

**Censer** (Anglo-Norman form of Old French *CENSIER*, aphetic form of *ENCENSIER* from *ENCENS*, “incense”) A metal container suspended from chains, used for burning *incense*. Also called a *thurible*.

**Ceremonial of Bishops** A book containing the various rites and ceremonies peculiar to *bishops*.

**Chalice** (Latin *CALIX*, “cup”) A cup of gold or gilt silver, used for the wine which is to be *consecrated* at *Mass*.

**Chant, Gregorian** A type of slow solemn usually unaccompanied vocal music, traditionally used for texts from the *Mass* and *Divine Office*. Developed in western *monasteries* from the tenth century onwards on a basis of various earlier Christian and Jewish vocal traditions, it is called Gregorian after Pope Gregory the Great (ob.604), whose association with it is however unproven.

**Chapel** (late Latin *CAPELLA*, originally a diminutive of *CAPPA* (cf. *cope*) meaning “little cloak”, hence a name for the shrine at Aix where the cloak of St Martin of Tours was kept as a relic; hence any section of a large church with a particular function or dedication). Either a partially separated section of a *church* with an *altar* in it (*side altar* in *side chapel*), or a free-standing building which does not serve a *parish* but only a small community.

**Chaplet** (Old French *CHAPELET*, “wreath for the head”) A loop of beads, on which various forms of prayer can be recited, the best-known being the *Rosary*.

**Chapter** Originally (i) the daily meeting of *monks* at which one chapter of the Rule was read before business; later (ii) similar meetings of *canons*; hence (iii) the business of the meeting itself, and (iv) the canons seen as a legislative body.

**Charism** (Greek *KHARISMA*, “grace, favour”) A gift of the *Holy Spirit* given to a specific person for a specific purpose; hence the sense of purpose and spiritual identity of that person, or of a group of persons such as a *Religious Order*.

**Charterhouse** (Middle English version of French place name, Chartreuse, earlier Charteuse, near Grenoble) A monastery of *Carthusians*.

**Chastity** The virtue of sexual self-restraint. For the married this means fidelity to their spouse, with due respect for each other and the law of God. For the unmarried this means *continence*: abstaining from deliberate sexual activity.

**Chasuble** (late Latin *CASUBLA*, “hooded cloak”) The sixth of the *vestments* for Mass, an all-enveloping sleeveless garment which covers the others as a symbol of charity. It forms a set with the *stole* etc., and is of different colours for different *seasons*.

**Cherub**, pl. **Cherubim** (Hebrew *KHERUB*, *KHERUBIM*) One of the orders of angels recognized by tradition. See *seraph*, *angel*.

**Child of Prague** See *Infant of Prague*.

**Chrism** (Greek *KHRISMA* from *KHRIEIN*, “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*).

**Christ** (Greek *CHRISTOS*, “anointed one”, translating Hebrew *MĀSIAH*, “anointed one, Messiah”) Common Catholic way of referring to Jesus, *Our Lord*.

**Christ the King** The last Sunday before *Advent*, a *Solemnity* to remind us that no earthly king or government can claim our loyalty, above Christ our true King.

**Christening** Traditional English term for *Baptism*, stressing that the person being baptized is now a Christian.

**Christmas** The *Solemnity* commemorating the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, lasting throughout the *Octave* of Christmas, the eight days until 1st January; the **Christmas Season** continues until the Sunday after *Epiphany*, although it formerly extended for forty days until *Candlemas* (2nd February).

**Chrysostom, Liturgy of St John** One of the three Eucharistic liturgies commonly used by the *Orthodox Church*.

**Church** (Old English *ĈIRIĈE* from Greek *KURIAKON*, “the Lord’s place”) (i) The entire community of all faithful Christians, united through space and time, with the *Pope* as the earthly focus of unity, and Christ alone as head. Formed by the *Eucharist*, and thus (like it) sometimes called the *Mystical Body of Christ*. There can only be one Church in this sense of the word; (ii) a “local” church as expression of the universal Church, with the *bishop* as focus of unity; effectively the same as a *diocese*; (iii) a building set aside and consecrated to be used for worship alone.

**Church Fathers** See *Fathers of the Church*.

**Ciborium** (Latin “drinking-cup” from Greek *KIBORION*, in medieval Latin wrongly supposed to be related to *CIBUM*, “food”) (i) An airtight container, usually shaped like a covered cup, for the *Blessed Sacrament*; used to contain *hosts* during *Mass*, before and after their *consecration*, and reserved in the *Tabernacle*; (ii) architectural term for a stone-built canopy over an *altar*, often curtained around; also known as a *baldacchino*.

**Cincture** (Latin *CINCTURA*, “girding”) The third of the *vestments* for *Mass*, a doubled cord to gird up the *alb* and hold the *stole* in place.

**Circumcision** The former name for the *Solemnity* on 1st January, reminding us that Jesus was a Jew in obedience to the Law. Also known as the *Octave* day of Christmas; now as the *Solemnity* of Mary, *Mother of God*.

**Cistercians** (Latin *CISTERCIENSIS*, “from Cîteaux”, a monastery near Dijon in France) *Monks* and *nuns* following the Rule of St Benedict in a strict manner, centrally organized; wearing white.

**Clergy** (Old French *CLERGÉ*, from Latin *CLERICATUS*, “the body of clerks”) Those men chosen by God to serve Him and His people, set aside by *ordination*, and with various duties and responsibilities.

**Clergyman** (i) a *cleric* or *clerk*; (ii) a term for the usual dress of secular priests (dark suit, shirt with clerical collar).

**Cleric** See *Clerk*.

**Clerk** (Old English from Latin *CLERICUS*, Greek *KLERIKOS*, “clergyman”, from *KLÉROS*, “lot”) A *cleric*, man in *Holy Orders*; **Clerks Regular** are members of a religious order which has vows, but also a mission to the world, such as the *Jesuits*. In the middle ages anyone educated would likely be a cleric, hence clerk comes to mean also “scholar, educated man” and eventually “office worker”.

**Co-adjutor** A *bishop* appointed to assist the bishop of a *diocese* in case of illness or incapacity; he has the right of succession to that *see* when it eventually falls vacant.

**Collect** A prayer led by the *priest* to collect or gather together the intentions of the people; in the *Mass* it comes after the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*.

**Colours, Liturgical** The *vestments* for *Mass* vary in colour according to the *liturgical season*. Particular seasons have their

own colours; whilst particular classes of *feast-day* are so marked also. The main colours are: violet for *Advent* and *Lent*; white for *Christmas* and *Easter*; red for *Pentecost* and the feasts of *martyrs*. Rose-pink vestments may be worn on the *Gaudete Sunday* and *Laetare Sunday*; and black may be worn for funerals (*Requiem Masses*) and on *All Souls' Day*.

**Commandments, Ten** The foundation of the moral law of the *Old Testament* (see Exodus 20). Also called the *Decalogue*.

**Commandments of the Church** Six obligations binding on all Catholics: to keep Sundays and *Holy Days of Obligation* holy by hearing *Mass* and resting from work; observing the appointed days of *penance*; to go to *Confession*, and receive *Communion*, at least once a year (see *Easter Duties*); to contribute to the support of the *clergy*; and not to marry within certain degrees of kindred.

**Communion, Holy** The act of receiving and consuming the Body and Blood of Christ under the form of the consecrated *Host* and the consecrated wine, usually at *Mass*. See *Eucharist*.

**Communion of Saints** The unity and mutual solidarity of all Christians living and dead, forming the *Church*.

**Communion verse** A text sung while *Communion* is being distributed at *Mass*.

**Compline** or *Night Prayer*, the last hour of the *Divine Office* at the end of the day.

**Concelebration** The practice of two or more *priests* joining together to celebrate the *Eucharist* simultaneously.

**Conclave** (Latin *CONCLAVĒ* from *CUM CLAVE*, “with a key”) The “locked-up” assembly of *Cardinals* charged with electing a new *Pope*.

**Confession** Admitting guilt and asking forgiveness for sins, the necessary precondition for receiving *absolution* in the *Sacrament of Penance*.

**Confessor** (i) A *priest* who hears *confession* in the *Sacrament of Penance*; (ii) a *saint* who is not a *martyr* but “confesses” his faith by the example of his life; e.g. St Edward, King and Confessor, so-called to distinguish him from his great uncle St Edward, King and Martyr.

**Confirmation** The *sacrament*, conferred by *anointing* on the forehead, that strengthens the Christian and brings to fulfilment the *gifts of the Holy Spirit* given in *baptism*; properly conferred by a *bishop*.

**Congregation** (Latin *CONGREGATIO*, “flocking together”) (i) A gathering of people in a *church*, usually for worship; (ii) a community e.g. of *priests* living together; (iii) a major department or *dicastery* of the *Holy See*, usually based in the *Vatican City*.

**Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)** The *dicastery* of the *Holy See* responsible for accurate teaching of Catholic *doctrine*, and with investigating complaints against teachers or writers who distort the faith. Formerly called the Roman *Inquisition*, subsequently the *Holy Office*; since 1965 called the CDF.

**Consecrate** (Latin *CONSECRARE*, var. of *CON-SACRARE*, “make altogether holy”) The act of handing over some person or thing over to God for His exclusive use. Hence **Consecration**, the central part of the *Mass*, when the bread and wine are consecrated to form the *Eucharist*.

**Consistory** (Latin *CONSISTORIUM*, “council chamber” from *CONSISTO*, “stand still, remain”) A meeting of *Cardinals* with the *Pope*, particularly when new *Cardinals* are created.

**Contemplation** A form of mental *prayer* without words and without thought; being still in the presence of God. “He looks at me and I look at Him.” Hence **Contemplative**, particularly applied to members of *religious orders* devoted to prayer.

**Continence** Refraining from deliberate sexual activity, as is expected of the unmarried.

**Contrition** (Latin *CONTRITIO*, “sorrow”) True sorrow for sin arising from the love of God.

**Contrition, Act of** A formal statement of sorrow for one’s sins, and undertaking to avoid them in future, made during *confession* or on another occasion.

**Convent** (Latin *CONVENTUS*, “assembly, community”) A religious community house; in England mainly used for houses of female *religious* or *nuns*.

**Cope** (Latin *CAPPA*, “cloak with hood”) A full-length open cloak, with a rudimentary hood, usually worn over a *cassock* and *surplice* for ceremonies other than *Mass*, such as weddings, *processions* and *Benediction*.

**Corporal** (Latin *CORPORALE* from *CORPUS*, “body”) A square white cloth unfolded on the *altar* to hold the *chalice* and *paten* during *Mass*. It may be stored in a *burse* until it is needed.

**Corporal Works of Mercy** Seven types of action appropriate for the Christian: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, housing the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned, burying the dead. See also *Spiritual Works of Mercy*.

**Corpus Christi** (Latin, “Body of Christ”) The Thursday after *Trinity Sunday*, a *Solemnity* to celebrate the gift of the *Eucharist*, marked with *processions* and solemn *Benediction*; now, in England and Wales, celebrated on the nearest Sunday.

**Cotta** (Italian, “cut short”) A shortened form of the *surplice*, worn over a *cassock* by those serving *Mass*.

**Council** A meeting of *bishops* to discuss matters of Christian *doctrine*, morals and discipline. Councils may be local, consisting of bishops from a particular nation or region, sometimes called a *Synod*, or they may involve all the bishops of the world in a **General Council**, also called an **Ecumenical Council** (Greek *OIKOUMENÉ*, “inhabited world”). The doctrinal decisions of a General Council may be formally defined and thus become part of the *Deposit of Faith*; pastoral and disciplinary decisions may be changed later.

**Credence Table** (often simply **Credence**) (French *CREDENCE*, Italian *CREDENZA*, “sideboard”) A small table used for the *sacred vessels* before they are placed on the *altar at Mass*.

**Creed** (Latin *CREDO*, “I believe”) A text setting out the articles of Catholic faith; the best-known are the **Apostles’ Creed**, used at *Baptism*, and the **Nicene Creed**, often used at *Mass* on Sundays. The much longer **Athanasian Creed** is encountered only rarely.

**Crosier** (two words, French *CROISIER*, “cross-bearer” and Old French *CROCIER*, “bearer of a bishop’s crook” here are combined, and their sense transferred from the bearer of the object to the object itself) A long staff of metal or wood, topped with a curled head like a shepherd’s crook, carried by *bishops* and *abbots* as a symbol of their pastoral care. Sometimes called a *pastoral staff* or a crook.

**Cross** (i) The primary symbol of the Christian faith, representing the cross on which Jesus died; (ii) a term for the salutary suffering given by God to the individual Christian to lead him to holiness. See *Sign of the Cross*.

**Crucifix** A *cross* bearing the figure of Jesus crucified (the figure is sometimes called a **Corpus**).

**Cruets** Small glass or metal jugs to contain wine and water for use at *Mass*.

**Curate** (Latin *CURATUS*, “one with responsibility for the care of souls”) Used in English to mean a junior or assistant *priest*. In France, a *curé* is a *parish priest*.

**Curia** (Latin, “court”) (i) Generally, any administrative organisation helping a *bishop* govern a *diocese*; (ii) with the definite article, and sometimes capitalized, the administrative offices of the *Holy See*.

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