Diverse practices of the Catholic Church community

Teacher Background

There are many beliefs and practices that are distinctively Catholic (although not necessarily unique to Catholicism). These should be studied not from a perspective of things that separate us from other Christians, but rather of understanding our own religious tradition. Ecumenical dialogue will be the more fruitful where people understand and are secure in their own traditions.

Catholicism has a strong sacramental tradition. This flows from a conviction that the Church continues Christ’s presence and mission in the world. The Church itself is the sacrament of Christ, making him visible and tangible in our world today. The seven sacraments express this in key moments and needs of life. The Eucharist is indisputably central to Catholic life. Other sacramental practices flow from this view of the Church: blessings, use of holy water, devotional practices. The doctrine of the Communion of Saints is another example. Practices such as veneration of the saints and prayer for the dead find meaning here.

Icons and symbols
There is almost no limit to the ability of Christianity to accommodate itself to artistic expression of every kind. Christian themes have inspired music as diverse as symphonies, operas, folk songs, chant and rock music. Increasingly the liturgy is being enriched by more diverse musical expression. Medieval cathedrals and baroque chapels are striking symbols of the importance worship of God had in community life. Modern architecture pays attention to the purpose and nature of worship and creates sacred spaces in keeping with contemporary culture. Literature and drama have always explored themes of ultimate meaning – life, death, sin, the struggle to be faithful, truth and relationships. These are deeply religious questions and the Christian view has been profoundly expressed and debated in many such works.