

Catechism Song: “12 Days of Christmas”

Legend has it that this song was written during a time of persecution in England between 1558 and 1829 as a catechism song for young Catholics who were forbidden to practice their faith. Each number signifies a teaching of our Faith. The song can be understood on two different levels - the literal meaning of the words, which appear harmless enough to a stranger, and the hidden meaning behind those words which expressed the religious beliefs of a people who could have been killed on account of their Catholic faith.

1st Day

- “True Love” represents God and “me” the baptized soul. The “partridge in a pear tree” is Jesus, symbolically shown as a mother partridge pretending injury to lure predators away from her nestlings. The mother dies to protect her young.

2nd Day

- “Two turtle doves” are the Old and New Testaments of the Bible;
- Noah brought *two* of every kind of species into the Ark;
- When Mary and Joseph presented the Child Jesus in the Temple, they offered *two turtle doves* (Luke 2:24).

3rd Day

- “Three French Hens” were beautiful and costly birds in those days. They represent faith, hope and charity, which can be given by God alone;
- They also represent the *three* persons of the Blessed Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
- And also the *three* days Christ spent in the tomb.

4th Day

- The “Four Calling Birds” are the *four* Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

5th Day

- The “Five Golden Rings” are the first *five* books of the Bible known as the Law, Torah or Pentateuch;
- and the *five* wise and *five* foolish virgins.

6th Day

- The “Six Geese A Laying” are the *six* days when God created everything.

7th Day

- The “Seven Swans A Swimming” represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord; Seven are appointed to assist the Apostles (Acts 6:3);
- Peter asks Jesus whether he should forgive his brother *seven* times (Matthew 18:21, Luke 17:4) and Jesus answers that he should forgive *70 times seven*, i.e., forgive with no limit;
- The Israelites marched *seven* days around Jericho with *seven* priests blowing *seven* horns (Jos 6:1); the *seventh* year is the year of the Sabbath;

- The *Seven Sacraments*: Baptism, Confession, Holy Communion, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Anointing of the Sick;
- The *seven Deadly Sins*: Pride (Ecc 10:15), Covetousness (Luke 12:15), Lust (Eph 5:5), Anger (Jos 1:19), Gluttony (Galatians 6:8), Envy (Story of Joseph in the Old Testament), Sloth (Revelation 3:15);
- The *seven Sorrows of Mary*: the Prophecy of Simeon, the Flight into Egypt, the Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple, Mary Meets Jesus on the Way to Calvary, Jesus Dies on the Cross, Mary Receives the Dead Body of Jesus from the Cross, Mary Places the Body of Jesus on the Tomb Awaiting the Resurrection.

8th Day

- The “Eight Maids A Milking” represent the *eight* Beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel.

9th Day

- The “Nine Ladies Dancing” refers to the *nine* fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22): Love Joy Peace, Patient Endurance, Kindness, Generosity, Faith Mildness and Chastity.

10th Day

- The “Ten Lords A Leaping” represent the *ten* commandments which guide our lives;
- The *ten* lepers cleansed by Jesus.

11th Day

- The “Eleven Pipers Piping” represent the *11* faithful Apostles, not including Judas.

12th Day

- The “Twelve Drummers Drumming” represent the *12* points of belief in the *Apostles’ Creed*;
- The *12* Tribes of Israel;
- The *12* Apostles.

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