

Why Do You Remain Catholic?

Objective:

For cradle Catholics, their religion can become a “cultural Catholicism” that is based more in habit than intention. There is the danger that custom is the driving force rather than being in a loving relationship with God. It has been said that former Catholics could be considered the second largest religion in the United States. The second point is a direct result of the first point. Come find out how to be a more intentional disciple of Jesus by reflecting on why you remain Catholic.

We all know people who are former Catholics. Some of us have left the Church and returned. Some of us were formerly members of other religions or did not even believe in God who became Catholic. We should not take our faith for granted. How can we be more intentional about our faith? Just asking the question, “Why do I remain Catholic?” is a good place to start. As a part of exploring that question, you can ask other questions related to it. Why do I go to mass each week? Who am I worshipping and why, and does how I worship Him matter? What is the Catholic Church and my relationship to it? What does Catholicism do for my life and for the world?

There are so many things one could point to as to why he or she remains Catholic. The sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The Church’s advocacy of social justice. The rich intellectual tradition of Catholicism. The communion of saints. The variety of spiritualities present within a truly universal (catholic) Church. It is also important to take an honest look at some of the reasons why people leave the Church which are within the Church’s control. The priest sex abuse scandal. Lack of clear and deep catechesis. Church members (clergy and lay) who are unwelcoming, self-righteous, unkind, and unforgiving. Cliques. Power and wealth driving parish life in ways contrary to the Gospel. A distortion of doctrine that leaves out mercy and compassion. The Church is holy, as we say every week in the Creed, but the Church’s members are sinners. If we as members of the Body of Christ better reflect Jesus, we will strengthen our own faith and the faith of others so that more Catholics will be intentional about their faith and remain Catholic.

Suggested Song:

How Can I Keep from Singing (Blue 192, vs 1,2,5; Red 598 vs 1, 2, 4; Music Issue 437)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

John 6:52-69

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.” This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you that do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not

believe, and who it was that should betray him. And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Mark 10:17-22

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

1 Peter 3:15-16

Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Catechism 846

How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? [the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church]. Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body:

Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.

Catechism 837

"Fully incorporated into the society of the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who - by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion - are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops. Even though incorporated into the Church, one who does not however persevere in charity is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but 'in body' not 'in heart.'"

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Why do you remain a Catholic? If you are a convert, why did you become a Catholic?

What aspects of the Church or its doctrines do you struggle with? What aspects deeply resonate with you?

What are some reasons why people you know have left the Church? How can your witness be a positive influence on their perceptions of Catholicism?

Recommended Resources:

1. G.K. Chesterton, "Why I am a Catholic": <http://www.chesterton.org/why-i-am-a-catholic/>
2. Elizabeth Scalia, "On Good Friday, Here's Why I Remain Catholic": <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125493179>
3. Bishop Robert Barron, "Bishop Robert Barron on Why Catholics Leave the Church" (video): <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=why%20i%20am%20catholic%20robert%20barron&q=n&form=QBVR&pq=why%20i%20am%20catholic%20robert%20barron&sc=0-21&sp=-1&sk=>
4. Patrick Madrid, "Why Be Catholic?" (video): <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=patrick+madrid+reasons+to+be+catholic&&view=detail&mid=1A4550799A5B27DDDFC91A4550799A5B27DDDFC9&FORM=VRDGAR>

Action Plan:

1. This week would be a good time to start reflecting on why you are Catholic.
2. If there are certain Church teachings that you struggle with, learn more about what the Church teaches on that topic, starting with the Catechism.
3. Thank the Lord in prayer for your gift of faith, for your relationship with Him, and His Church.

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