

The Relevance of Our Catholic faith in Today's World

Objective: By definition, relevant means “appropriate to the current time, period, or circumstances; of contemporary interest.” Now, the “world” is an awfully big place and one which I’m not sure I (nor we) are equipped to discuss. So let’s focus on “our world” the United States, Ohio, Cincinnati, Anderson/Mt. Washington, and/or perhaps your own neighborhood. Is the Catholic faith “appropriate to the current time or circumstances”? I can’t think of anything else that is more relevant. So how do our beliefs and teachings apply to today’s issues?

Song Suggestion: We Are Many Parts (Red 727)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Matthew 7:15-18

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit.

Matthew 25: 35-40

‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

Catechism 830 – 831

First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. "Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church." In her subsists the fullness of Christ's body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him "the fullness of the means of salvation" which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession. The Church was, in this fundamental sense, catholic on the day of Pentecost and will always be so until the day of the Parousia. Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race: Saints: St. Pope John Paul II – arguably the most worldly, relevant, modern, and model Catholic of our lifetime. And St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta – in addition to her many amazing attributes and corporal works of mercy, she is contemporarily known for her message “... Forgive them anyway ... ” message.

Vignette: In today's politically and religiously divisive atmosphere, which is causing incredible emotional, intellectual, physical, and even spiritual stress, from where do the answers come as to how to deal with these stresses? In a society that does not want to recognize absolute truths or an Authority above themselves, the challenge to bring the Catholic way to bear on these situations is all the more needed, while at the same time (perhaps) more rejected than ever. Does that mean that we should not try? Absolutely not. “If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me first.” (John 15:18)

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Why are you a Catholic? And if you are a convert, why did you become a Catholic?

What percent of the Catholic church's teachings are you familiar with? And do you think its important to know 100% of them? (Compare those answers to the amount of knowledge you have of sports or movies or politics or some other area of interest.)

In what Catholic practices do you engage? And in which ones do you not engage – and why not?

Do you ever think that people of other faiths/denominations are “doing more” than you/we are? For example, how do you feel about hearing about Matthew 25 ministries, or Le Soup, or Crossroads' activities?

How can your witness be a positive influence on their perceptions of Catholicism?

Action Plan:

1. Find a good resource to help grow your knowledge of the Catholic faith. (Ex: Dynamic Catholic, Word on Fire, Sacred Heart Radio, www.catholicanswers.org, Innvvisions, The Catholic Shop, Mt. St. Mary's Seminary of the West, or (last but certainly not least) members of your very own parish (Priests, Deacons, DRE, Youth Ministers, fellow parishioners, etc.)
 2. Meet with a ministry that you've never experienced before, or one that you feel called to because of their work. Explore whether you could/should have an active role with them.
 3. Talk with other lay adults who have availed themselves of various educational or developmental resources (ex: Bible studies, Formed.org, CRHP programs, RCIA, Consecration to Mary of St. Joseph programs, etc.) to get their take on the experience.
 4. Commit to engaging in one new Catholic ministry each year that provides you with an opportunity to both learn/grow AND demonstrate your faith to others. (Ex: St. Vincent dePaul, Right to Life, 40 Days for Life, Pregnancy Center East, The Mary Magdalene House, Old St. Mary's ministries, etc.)
 5. Begin one new Catholic practice every 6-12 months. (Ex: daily Mass, praying the Rosary, going to Reconciliation more regularly, listening to Catholic podcasts, fasting, reading the Bible, etc.)
- *BONUS: Have this new activity replace some other, negative or less valuable “wordly” activity (ex: watching TV, eating out, playing golf, going to the gym, etc.)

Author: Vince Phelan (updated from Steve Von Hoene)