

Why are we Catholic?

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- 1. St. Cyprian of Carthage**, martyr & Bishop, wrote in 249 AD, “He who would have God as his Father must have the Church as his Mother.”
- 2. Without the Catholic Church, there is no salvation.** All Protestant Christians, whether they believe it or not, are Christians because the Catholic Church exists. Jesus prayed what is called the High Priestly Prayer in John, Chapter 17, when He said, “I pray that they are one Father, just as you and I are one.” In the simplest terms, all Protestant Christians are wayward Catholics. This statement would infuriate most Protestants. That does not make this objective fact any less true. We all have believed something, thinking it is true, only to find we have been misinformed. Such is the case for every Protestant believer who thinks their denomination speaks nothing but truth.
- 3. What happened?** Christian unity, as Jesus would have it, has fallen a long way from when the 12 Apostles were given the charge of going out to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To be clear about how difficult unity is to achieve, the Catholic Church has had many of its members disagree with certain doctrines of the Church. The unity problem has always been real, which is always the reason for calling Church Councils, thus making many declarations of faith, known as Church Dogmas. Dogma is a fancy word for a set of principles laid down by an authority that is incontrovertibly true. There are 255 infallibly declared dogmas of the Catholic Church.
- 4. How long did it take for a difference of opinion to filter into the newly formed Christian way of life?** We know from scripture it happened and it happened too often, resulting in the need for written instruction given to the Church by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to His disciples, “teach them all that I have taught you.” Yet, as we know, people don't like submitting to someone else. Most people prefer to “be in charge” and that form of pride has resulted in differences of opinion, many times resulting in severe spiritual disagreements.
- 5. Knowing spiritual disagreements would enter the Church, Jesus put a plan in place.** The plan included a hierarchy, with Peter in charge, as he was the Apostle given

the keys to the kingdom. Whatever the Church bound on earth was bound in heaven, whatever the Church loosed on earth was loosed in heaven. Peter was the rock on which the Church was built. Further, Jesus said He would be with the Church always & the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church. It should be noted, given the nature of man, it seems God could have come up with a better plan.

6. Did Jesus really want and expect the Church to remain as one, with disagreements settled through church authority? Yes, He did, and that expectation has resulted in many Church members labeled heretic, as they would not submit to the authority of the Church. In other words, the Church would remain united in its effort to make disciples, encouraging all men to repent, be baptized and follow Christ. We know there are approximately 33,000 so-called Christian denominations. Is it possible Jesus' prayer for the Church to remain united simply didn't work? Let's examine His plan for a united Church!

7. Scripture, as written out of necessity, has a very specific set of instruction regarding unity & those in authority. Hebrews 13:17 says, "submit to those in authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account." In other words, they are responsible to God for their part in instruction, warning, and correction. Romans 13:1-2 says, "Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God & those that exist (authoritative hierarchy) have been established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed. And those who oppose it (authority) will bring judgment upon themselves." Note: No Protestant Pastor, at any time, has preached a message on unifying all Christian denominations. Why, if Jesus prayed to be one would they not think it important to "air all differences" and get all Christians on the same page? The answer, even though it sounds harsh, is because they speak for their own denomination, not realizing how far they have drifted from the fullness of truth. In other words, when you break from the Church, you have become the "Pope/authority" of the new denomination or movement if they are a non-denominational, independent community.

8. It cannot and never will be ok to decide "it's just me and the scriptures." Many well-meaning people believe they will be led by the Holy Spirit, enabling them to have proper interpretation of what God is saying to us through Holy Scripture. A simple way to approach this argument by many well-meaning Protestants is, "what came first...the Liturgy or the Bible?" The Liturgy came first by 400 years.

9. Why are we Catholic? Should everyone be Catholic? Yes, everyone should be Catholic, because Jesus started one church & it happens to be the Catholic Church. That's the simple answer; however, like everything, there is more to the story. We are Catholic because we need The Church, which is the governing authority on all things spiritual. Like it or not, Jesus placed a hierarchy within the Church and that hierarchy, otherwise known as the Magisterium, comprised of the Pope and Bishops, is the final authority on all differences of opinion (See Acts, Ch. 15).

10. We are Catholic because nothing this side of heaven compares to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is celebrated daily, throughout the world, and it is celebrated in exactly the same fashion...Liturgy of the Word & Liturgy of the Eucharist.

11. The Mass has been celebrated exactly the same since the Last Supper. Justin Martyr confirmed this fact by sending a letter to the Emperor in the year 150A.D. His description of the Mass reflects the same liturgy we use today in 2017. This fact of the same liturgy for 2000 years is nothing short of amazing. What a privilege to be a member of the Catholic Church! The Mass is the perfect prayer offered to God in thanksgiving for His death and resurrection. The Mass is a perfect sacrifice of praise offered to God on behalf of the entire Church. The Mass is the most effective prayer we can be a part of. Knowing how pleasing the Mass is to God, we should forever put to rest the idea of the Mass being boring. Rather, we should go to Mass with an attitude of thanksgiving, as we take part, with the Priest, in offering the bread, wine & ourselves to God. Oh, that all Catholics would understand the importance of attending and participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass!!

12. Why are we Catholic? ...because we have been given a piece of heaven right here on earth, in the form of the Sacraments. The Sacraments are God's evidence of a spiritual work of grace and they are available in every corner of the world every day. Every day, you can receive the Bread of Life; the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ. Each time we attend Mass, we can have our venial sins forgiven and receive a blessing from Christ, in persona Christi, through the Priest.

13. Why should everyone be Catholic? ...because the Catholic Church is the only church to hold to the same teaching about Mary, the Mother of God. It should be noted that the original Protestant Reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others all held to the belief in Mary's perpetual virginity. Practically none of the Protestant denominations today believe this teaching. Mary is the New Eve, according to the Catholic Church.

Assumed into heaven after her death and without sin is a hard pill for Protestants to swallow. Called the Ark of the New Covenant, could there be a more important intercessor for the salvation of all mankind? Think of the wedding at Cana, as she instructed the servants to fill the jars with water, even after Jesus seemed to indicate it wasn't yet time to start his public ministry. Because her request was granted, when it didn't seem an appropriate request, how often should we request her intercession for all of our prayer needs! Imagine what happens in heaven when Mary takes your prayer to the very throne of God! She may say something like this, "Jesus, my Son, your people are asking for the needs of their loved ones and they are asking for their 'jars/souls' to be filled with the Holy Spirit." I like the chances of Jesus honoring the request of Mary. There can be no greater intercessor than Mary, and to think many Christians have called the Catholic Church idolators, because of their veneration of Mary. Look closely at the words spoken in the Hail Mary, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen!" Well, do you think she does pray for us at our final breath and what that may mean regarding eternity? FILL THOSE JARS is a prayer we should use daily!

14. Why should everyone be Catholic?because the Catholic Church represents what is called the fullness of truth. What is truth and who has the right to define truth is the sole responsibility of the Catholic Church. The Church was handed the keys to the kingdom of heaven according to Holy Scripture. Consequently, it is not okay for anyone to "agree to disagree" over theological differences. Someone is right and someone is wrong, as all disagreeing parties can't all be right regarding spiritual truths. You can, therefore, look at all Dogmas of the Catholic Church as lights along the narrow road that leads to eternal life.

15. Why should we be Catholic?because if you belong to the Catholic Church, you belong to the Mystical Body of Christ. Other denominations define Christianity as simply being part of the Body of Christ. The Catholic Church, however, defines the entire Body of Christ in three parts: 1) The Church Triumphant – these members of the Church consist of all those who have died and are in heaven, all willing to make intercession on our behalf. Shame on us if we do not take advantage of these mighty prayer warriors. 2) The Church Suffering – these members are being purged of their final impurities. Hallelujah for Purgatory, as most of us will have some impurities that will need addressing. The final result of this suffering will see all souls brought into the

Church Triumphant. There is no definitive dogma as to whether those in Purgatory can pray for us. Rather, the only infallible teaching provided by the Church affirms how effective our prayer is for them, especially the Mass. 3) Finally, we here on earth are the final piece that comprises the entire Body of Christ...The Church Militant. We have been given the present tense task of being the “hands of Christ.” We must take this responsibility seriously. A simple smile, done for Christ, can change a person's life. We have been tasked with the same goal as the original Apostles...”go, make disciples of all nations. Tell of the good news...Jesus has died for your sins and he has risen from the dead. Come follow Me and I will make you the light of the world.” He simply asks of us to live in such a way that others would be drawn to Christ. The Catholic Church is the only church with this definition of the Body of Christ.

16. Why should we be Catholic? ...because should you knowingly and willfully fall into mortal sin, you can have that grave sin forgiven, forgotten and thrown into the “sea of forgetfulness.” As far as the East is from the West, He will remember our sins no more; that's what Holy Scripture says happens to our sins every time we confess them. Gone, forgiven, and forgotten! How is this possible? Good question! Jesus said to His Apostles, in John 20:21-22: “As the Father sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness the sin will not be forgiven.” Listen to the prayer, provided through the authority of the Church, said by the Priest, when forgiving, in Persona Christi, to the sinner seeking forgiveness: “God, the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of your Son, you have reconciled the world to yourself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you of your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen!” There can be no greater words spoken by anyone at any time. The Priest, given the power to forgive sins, on behalf of Christ, is literally causing all of heaven to rejoice. When Jesus said, “what you bind on earth is bound in heaven,” you can rest assured all your sins have been forgiven through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Not using the Confessional on a regular basis is to play Russian Roulette with all chambers fully loaded.

17. We must ask ourselves, do we live as if the Church is a living and true gift from God or have we fallen into the trap of, “compared to everyone else, I'm not so bad.”

Think of who set the bar and how high did He set it? Scripture admonishes, “Strive for peace with everyone, and strive for holiness. For without holiness no one will see the Lord.” When Jesus was asked, “Lord, will only a few be saved...He responded, “Strive to enter through the narrow door, for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction.” Our goal must be to grow in holiness (this is the Church's goal for you) and if it is, how under used is the Confessional?

18. Why do we need the Church and how imperative is it that we stay close to her?

The easiest explanation is that we are not very smart. We are selfish, full of ourselves and are easily led astray. For example, Moses was used as God's servant to deliver the Israelites from the bondages of slavery at the hands of the Egyptians. The Israelites were delivered from slavery and they were aware of the plagues brought on the Egyptians by God for their deliverance. They witnessed the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Egyptian Army as the Red Sea swallowed them after they had passed through miraculously. They were fed Manna from heaven. They complained about the Manna and the Lord provided Quail. They groaned to Moses for water and water flowed from a rock. On another occasion, Moses became so frustrated with the Israelites that he struck a rock with his staff even though God had given him instructions not to strike the rock. This cost Moses dearly, as he was then not allowed to enter the promised land with the stubborn Israelites he had led for almost 40 years. He died before they entered.

19. Joshua was to take his place and he too became so frustrated with the obstinate Israelites that he admonished them to make a decision, as he told them in anger, “choose you this day who you will serve...as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” You see that is the key, as we too must choose daily who we will serve. We, as Catholics, have been given every tool available for holiness through the Church. We have the Church, Mary, The Mystical Body of Christ, The Saints, The Word of God (Bible) & The Sacraments. Never should we take lightly what happens every day, at every Mass, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who come to the Supper of the Lamb.” To be a practicing Catholic & ready to receive Jesus in Holy Communion is to be in perfect unity with God, period. However, we must not take lightly the need for a good “spiritual exam” before receiving Jesus, for this is truly holy ground you are walking on, as you move from the safety of your pew to the steps that lead to heaven...or, according to Paul in his letter to the Corinthians, steps

that will lead to, “for this reason many among you are sick, weak, and a number sleep (have died).” 1 Cor. 11:30

20. As Father Larry Richards has said, “either you are a saint and going to heaven or you are NOT a saint & you will be going to hell.” There is no more of a sure way to heaven than to be safely instep with Holy Mother Church, otherwise know as the Catholic Church. May every person on earth be drawn to God today & may we all see God's plan for one, unified Church. Mary, please intercede for all people and ask again for the jars to be filled; the jars being every living soul, that God's mercy would not fall short of anyone! Amen