

# WHY DO

# CATHOLICS.....DO

# THAT?!

## ***1. WHY DO CATHOLICS HAVE STATUES, PICTURES, etc. IN THEIR CHURCHES?***

During Christmastime the religious images we have around through greeting cards, etc. are images of those who remind us of the message of Christmas: Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Also, as a child my favorite part of Christmas was a beautiful antique Italian nativity set which we put up for the season. I had always secretly thought that the only thing I wanted in any inheritance from my parents was that Nativity set.

These images are REMINDERS of the religious aspect of the Christmas season, and they help us to remember the birth of Christ even while we are at home.

This is a nice thing, and so Catholics just do this **all year long** using statues, stained glass, paintings, and icons. It simply is religious art that is meant to REMIND us of what they did and to INSPIRE us.

Also, having pictures of Mary or the other saints in our homes or churches, is like keeping pictures of people we love or admire around our home or in phone or wallet – these images remind us of the love in our lives.

Finally, even in the Bible, there is evidence of GOD using statues of the figures of angels to decorate the TABERNACLE in the Old Testament: In Exodus 25: 18b-19 we hear: “And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. <sup>19</sup> Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends.”

So, while the Ten Commandments told the Israelites not to “worship graven images,” (as in their WORSHIP of the statue of the golden calf that had transpired out in the desert), even God is comfortable with using IMAGES as ART: Which is what Catholics do.

## **2. Not all Christians ask Mary or the saints to pray for them like Catholics do.**

All Christians ask their friends and family to pray for them: Even though Catholics acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and are led by the Holy Spirit in our lives, all Christians turn to friends and family and the people in their church to pray for them. Mary and the saints are mentioned a lot in Catholic faith life because ***we think of them as our friends and family*** and so seek their prayers and help in our spiritual lives just as any Christians ask those who love them to pray for them in their journey of faith.

Catholics say that we believe that we have a “family” in heaven (the “Communion of Saints”) that are just as able to pray for us as the people with whom we live at home.

So, we don’t pray **to** saints, pray **THROUGH** saints just as we don’t pray **to** the people when we ask for the prayers of those around us: Whether the prayers of our sister-in-law or our barber or whomever.

Finally, we can see in Scripture a reference to the prayers of the saints: In Revelation 6:9, we read: “When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained.”

These *souls* are martyrs and Revelation is saying that their witness and example somehow are important in heaven. And that their example and testimony “support” the prayers and praise of HEAVEN. So, this is an example of what was meant by the "prayers of the saints" can be seen as IMPORTANT TO GOD AND HEAVEN in Scripture.

### **3. Why do Catholics think that we need a Church between us and God, when Jesus said all we need is faith in HIM?**

Well, the first thing we might say is that Catholics try to see what Jesus said in Scripture as a whole. So, surely, Jesus in John 3:16 said we just needed to profess faith in Jesus and so have eternal life. But Catholics also remember OTHER quotes from the Bible where Jesus TOLD US to be part of a CHURCH and that this CHURCH WAS IMPORTANT. And that PETER WAS TO HEAD THE CHURCH, and that THE HOLY SPIRIT WOULD GUIDE THE CHURCH until he returned in glory....and that this Church was important, even to heaven....

*(and Jesus said)....Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona!....I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” – Matt 16: 11-14.*

Not that the Church should get too full of itself!

### **4. Why Do Catholics Organize Themselves as a Large, Institutional Church?**

*We know from the New Testament that the earliest Church did have a sense of being part of a larger Church and of the importance of being spiritually in union with one another. How is this better than belonging to a small, local congregation that is “independent?”*

- In Acts 4:32, we hear that “...the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul.”

*But this unity was not just in local congregations. The Christians of that time, even the very earliest generation, saw themselves as united in terms of their need to help one another in times of need, and also in terms of belief. So that:*

- In Acts 15 St. Paul submits his views and the views of others in what is now Turkey and Greece for discussion with St. Peter and the others in Jerusalem. This is called the first Council of the Church. They take it for granted, in Acts, that everyone in the whole Church that follows Jesus needed to be on the same page at the Council of Jerusalem, not each one following a different belief.
- And in Acts 19 Paul is helping to collect money for the poor followers of Jesus in Jerusalem up in Antioch, in Turkey, so, not just in belief, but in terms of humanitarian aid, they felt united with Christians even far away.

### **5. Why Do Catholics have deacons and priests and bishops? Why have these special jobs?**

- We know that Jesus chose the apostles to be leaders in his Church, and that the apostles then chose and “prayed over and layed hands on” others for specific roles in the Church – so that in Acts 6:2-6, we see the apostles choosing and “laying hands on and praying over” the first deacons. The “twelve” “made” them deacons. Also see: Acts 14, 23.
- Bishops and deacons are solidly part of the early Church by the time of the letter I Timothy 3: (Bishops and deacons should be mild and kind and not recent converts, etc., etc.)

- For example, there is a letter from St. Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote a letter to the people of Philadelphia (now in Turkey) on the way to his martyrdom in Rome (between 90 and 117AD) where he wrote: “(Let all be in)...unity with the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons, who have been appointed according to the mind of Jesus Christ, whom He has established in security, after His own will, and by His Holy Spirit.”

## 6. Why Do Catholics Have A Pope?

Well, in the Bible Jesus made Peter the head of the Church (see above.) Peter died in Rome (as did St. Paul), and, from the earliest years of the Church, this bishop was associated with Peter and with leadership in the Church. ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN ROME HAVE UNEARTHED, UNDER ST. PETER’S BASILICA, IN ROME, THE EARLY TOMB OF PETER.

We can also see from the Acts of the Apostles that St. Peter had a special leadership role in the early Church, and this continued. Indeed, it makes sense that if Peter had been chosen by Jesus, that his leadership would be passed onto SOMEONE. In the mind of the early Church, this leadership was to Peter’s successor in Rome as bishop. Here are some quotes about that:

1. *Hermas*: From “The Shepherd of Hermas”, (80 AD): “(Write your thoughts down and give them)...to Clement (bishop of Rome, the Pope)...and Clement shall then send it to the cities abroad, because that is his duty.”
2. *St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop of Antioch*: “Letter from Ignatius of Antioch to the Church in Rome,” (110 AD): From Ignatius to the church which also holds the presidency in the country of the Romans....you hold the presidency...others you have taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instructions may remain in force.”
3. *St. Irenaeus of Lyons, bishop of Lyons*: “Against Heresies,” (189 AD), (We...) point out here...the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With that church...all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition.”

## 7. What about Papal Infallibility?

- **First spelled out** at the First Vatican Council (1869-70). This teaching says that the Pope may issue teachings that are considered infallible.
- *However, an important nuance of the teaching says that he may not issue any infallible teaching that is not already believed by the people of the Church (as in, Jesus rose, physically, from the dead.)*
- *So, it is fascinating to know that, in the one time since 1870 that there has been a teaching from the Pope that was declared infallible (or “ex cathedra”) – that Mary was assumed into heaven, which was issued in the 1950 under Pope Pius X -- the pope first sent out letters to all the bishops in the world asking if the faithful in their dioceses believed these teachings already. Having heard affirmatively from the bishops he then issued his statements infallibly.*

## 8. WHY DO CATHOLICS BELIEVE THAT HOLY COMMUNION IS JESUS?

- In John 6, there is an extensive talk by Jesus about how he is “the bread of life come down from heaven”. For example, in one passage after Jesus had called himself the bread of life to a group of people, and his listeners were arguing among themselves about what this meant, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Jesus said to them....  
*”Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven....the one who eats this bread will live forever.*
- **COMBINE THIS INFORMATION WITH:** the writings about the mass that the first generation of Christians, who knew the apostles, wrote, you will see they took the Eucharist literally.

For example, St. Ignatius of Antioch, who knew the Apostle John personally, wrote a letter to the people of Smyrna in 100 AD (v. 19-20): *“Pay close attention ...that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for our sins....”*

And “The First Apology of St. Justin” from 150 AD says,

*This food we call Eucharist ...we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God’s word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus (ch. 66).*

## 9. Why Do Catholics Celebrate the Mass the Way they Do?

**For a Catholic, we look back to the early Christians and see that Sunday worship was always centered on the Eucharist.**

- In the the gospels of Matthew (Mt 26:26-29), Mark (Mk 14:22-25), and Luke (Lk 22:19-20) we hear of Jesus and his disciples gathering on the night before he died to share a meal of bread and wine that, he says, will be his body and his blood. He also asks them to gather together for meals of bread and wine, in the future, in his memory.

We also recall that in John 6 where Jesus tells his disciples they had to eat his body and drink his blood, so many people left him because they couldn’t take him literally that Jesus sat with his disciples and said, “Will you all also go?” (that is, would they also leave him?)

- **We could find quotes from the Bible to see that they also practiced the Last Supper:**

Acts of the Apostles 2:42: *They continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of the bread and prayers.*

We can also see this from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians 11:23-25:

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.: I the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*

**Ancient documents show that the early Christians continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of the bread and prayers.** Catholics, as the Early Christians did, keep the mass/the Lord’s Supper as the center of their regular worship of God.

**By the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, most Christians were no longer worshipping in both a synagogue and celebrating the Lord’s Supper separately,** so they began to have, basically, a synagogue service (with readings from scripture, and a sung psalm response) first and then to have the Lord’s Supper – much as we do today.

**Early Christian worship soon developed a set order, which is most famously documented in a document from about 150AD,** “The First Apology of St. Justin, Martyr.” This document, the most famous defense of Christian beliefs, he writes about a normal Eucharist celebration:

*...On the day called Sunday there is a meeting in one place of those who live in cities or the country, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the presider in a discourse urges and invites us to the imitation of these nobler things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. On finishing the prayers we greet each other with a kiss. Then bread and a cup of water and mixed wine are brought up to the presider of the brethren and he, taken them, sends up praise and glory to the Father of the universe....and offers thanksgiving at some length. And...when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water, and the presider similarly sends up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen; then the distribution, and reception of the consecrated elements by each one, takes place...Those who prosper, and who so wish, contribute, each one as much as much as he chooses to. What is collected is deposited with the presider, and he takes care of orphans and widows, and those who are in want on account of sickness or any other cause, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among us, and briefly, he is the protector of all in need. We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead....*

We feel that the closer you get to the people who walked and talked and spent time with Jesus, the closer you get to what Jesus wanted us to do. In a world where there are tens of thousands of different Christian churches all proclaiming they have “the truth,” this is a good way to play it safe in following Jesus.

### **10. Why don't Catholics look to the Bible as their only source of truth? Why do they talk about “traditions” as well. Doesn't that go against Scripture?**

An interesting point on this would be what a man named David Currie says in his book Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic, brings up when he talks about the Council of Jerusalem in Acts of the Apostles where the early Christians worked out issues regarding gentile Christians and whether or not they needed to be circumcised, etc. to follow Jesus:

“...the Council of Jerusalem did not refer to any word from Jesus or the Old Testament, NO, the decision was made based on the Council's own authority....people guided by the Holy Spirit....were to take over the leadership of the Church.” (Jn 16:13)

So, when we look at those first Christians – and not just any Christians, but St. Peter and St. Paul and all of them, and we see that they felt that the Holy Spirit had given them authority AS A CHURCH, then that gives us an understanding as to why Catholics feel that the Church has authority today.

Catholics believe that the Bible is God's teaching for us (which was put together by the Catholic Church during the first generations of members of the Church) AND THAT THE BIBLE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ARTICLE OF FAITH FOR A CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN....but also, we see God working through the faith community. Catholic Christians look at what Jesus said in his ministry on earth in the New Testament, and we also look to the Old Testament. But we also say that Jesus promised (Mat 16 and 18) that the Holy Spirit has taught through the Church also over the last two thousand years.

Also, we would not that the BIBLE never says that the only source of truth for the believe is in the Bible.

Indeed, the following are all examples of teachings that show Jesus or St. Paul asking people to trust oral tradition/that which was not written down in the Bible:

1. *In Matthew 23. Jesus actually told the Jewish people of his time to follow the Pharisee's traditions and teachings – saying “The teachers of the law sit on Moses's seat, so you must obey them.”*
2. *Also, in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 we hear St. Paul say “...Stand firm and hold onto the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”*
3. *Or in 2 Tim 2:2 “You....my son, be strong....And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”*

Furthermore, one example among many others is that the word TRINITY is not in the Bible. But the early Church wrestled with Scripture and was inspired (Jesus promised this in Matt 16 and 18) to come up with how to describe God in this way, or, for another example, they came up with many different teachings to understand exactly how Jesus, in our understanding, is both GOD AND MAN.

These central beliefs of the Christian faith were, indeed, worked out by the Church: Specifically by gatherings of leaders in the Church where they prayed and talked about these issues. Because after the Council of Jerusalem, there were many Councils of the Church.

So, Catholics come up with answers to these issues involves using Scripture, but also the Holy Spirit working through the Church

### **11. The Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession, penance):**

From John 20:19–23. "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were.... Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them

again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*"

On the other hand, we know that in the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee in the Bible, the tax collector who is a "sinner" simply says "Lord have mercy on me a sinner" and Jesus says he is "justified" through that simple action.

So there has always been a "both/and" sense in the Church: That each Christian can turn to God personally and individually to be forgiven by God, but also that God has given the CHURCH a role in helping God's forgiveness to rest on the hearts and lives of the members of the Church community.

So Catholics believe that if you had committed a serious sin, but were stuck on a desert island and could not access a priest, you could be forgiven by God of your sins by saying them in your heart to Jesus. On the other hand, Catholics see the opportunity to PRAY WITH ANOTHER, and have ANOTHER SAY TO YOU THAT JESUS FORGIVES YOU OUT LOUD, as you also have to SAY ALOUD YOUR SINS is a good thing. It is good because it is an opportunity to be assisted by the CHURCH THAT JESUS STARTED as Jesus told the apostles to forgive sins in his name.

Jesus started his Church so that it could be a help in the lives of believers in following Him. Since the sacrament of reconciliation can be a help to Christians in:

- turning to the Lord for forgiveness,
- turning over a new leaf,
- and experiencing the sense of forgiveness from God → it is a good thing.

The text of the "prayer of absolution" used by a priest in the sacrament of reconciliation echo John 20:19–23 and show that the sacrament really tells the penitent that GOD is forgiving their sins. It says, "*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sin, through the ministry of the Church. May God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*"

The words say that GOD is doing the forgiving, not the priest.