

Catholic 101 – The Basics

What it means to be Catholic

Overview

There are some fundamental beliefs in Catholicism that we share with all Christians and some that are unique and having great meaning to Catholics.

What are the basics?

Catholics are of course first and foremost Christians. I once had an RCIA candidate ask me if Catholics were Christian. A Christian is basically a follower of Jesus Christ – but the Catholic maintains the teachings and traditions which are 2000 years old.



For example if you want to see how old the celebration of the mass is - read paragraph 1345 of the Catechism. This is an excerpt from a letter written by St Justin in the year 155 “explaining what Christians did” during the mass.

What it **means** to be a Catholic can be best expressed by the Basics – sometimes taken for granted. Let’s take a very brief look at them – keeping in mind that each of these can (and have) filled volumes of books.

- **Jesus** is truly and fully both God and Man – as the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity. To Catholics this means that God reached out and touched humanity.
- There is only one God – but there are three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the **Holy Trinity**. In a special way this spiritual math says that 1 + 1 + 1 still equals 1.
- Catholics believe that the **Bible** is inspired by God, written by human hands and is error free. It is not a history or science book but God’s message to His creation. Some have said that “The bible is not all about heaven – but all about how to get to heaven”. The bible means

that Catholics can read what God expects from us. It has just as much meaning today as it did 2000 - 2500 years ago.

- There are **7 Sacraments** which leads us to a greater union with our God. They fulfill the promises of Jesus and one can find the basis for all of them in the bible.
- **Baptism** is the first of the 7 Sacraments and it the rite of initiation to becoming a Christian. This means that Baptism is necessary for salvation, whether by water, blood or desire. What it means to me is that I have an invisible mark that cannot ever be erased. It also means that it is not a free ride to heaven and that we must take the actions needed.
- **Holy Eucharist** is one of the 7 sacraments that transform ordinary bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. Read the account in John Chapter 6 and you will never have a doubt that this is exactly what Jesus meant, said and did. For Catholics it means that Jesus is with us when we receive Holy Communion.
- Catholics belong to **Parishes** which are our local place of worship and provides Catholics with a meaningful family. At one time a parish was an actual physical border and the family life revolved around it but in most cases this is no longer the case. All parishes are a part of a larger diocese in union to the Vatican. This means that there is a central source of authority. Many other Christian churches do not have this and have become fractured.
- The celebration of the **Mass** is the primary way of worship for Catholics. Weekend (Saturday or Sunday) is a moral obligation. The mass is universal which means that the same mass and same bible readings are used in churches all over the world. When I traveled around the world this concept had significant meaning to me as I could still attend mass - no matter what the spoken language was.

The Basics mean a great deal

The **Basics** means that we Catholics can count our blessings. Sometimes we can take them for granted but they are the core of Catholicism.