

Catholic 101 – What it means to be Catholic

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Overview

For several years I have been writing about the Catholic faith in this 5-Minute Catechism. I will begin a new series of articles that I will call “*Catholic 101*” and which will present the faith from a different perspective. Other series have been about Bible Basics, Apologetics and Theology for beginners.

What does it mean to be Catholic?

The spirit of Catholic 101 can be best expressed by answering the question: *What does it mean to be Catholic?*



If you asked the typical Catholic what it meant to be Catholic they are likely to respond with a litany of tenants of the faith. These replies might include: The sacraments, the mass, the Eucharist, the bible, the people, Christian values, prayers, Mary, the Saints, and dozens of other responses.

These responses are all good – especially if we have enthusiastically embraced them - but there is so much more than if we just stack them up like Boy Scout badges. That is, our responses might include some or all of these but what does it mean to be a Catholic? How does all of this come together – and does it matter? Everything does indeed matter as it helps to define what we are.

Who do say that I am?

Jesus asked this question of his Apostles. Scriptures tells us that Peter said that he was the Christ or the Anointed One which they recognized as being the Messiah, the Savior that they had been waiting for. Jesus also answered the Jewish leaders when they questioned who he was with the expression “**I AM**”. The theological explanation of the phrase “**I AM**” is that Jesus was saying that he was God because he always was – with no beginning nor ending. The expression “**I AM**” has no tense – past, present or future. It is what Jesus was and is – the Eternal God.

Therefore your response to the question should come from inside of you. We sometimes say “*that it comes from the heart*”. If we have spent countless years studying the Catholic faith becoming an expert – but have not carried this faith to our hearts - we have missed something very important. When we carry any knowledge into our hearts it becomes what we are and how we act.

This is the difference between “*head*” and “*heart*” knowledge. Saint Paul said this in his letter to the Corinthians (1Corinthians 13:3) – “*If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast, but do not have love, I have nothing*”. Love comes from from the heart so Saint Paul was saying that without love in what we do - *we have nothing*.

What it means to me to be Catholic is just that - *it is what I am*. In the early church, followers of Jesus were often called “*people of the way*” because they were “different” than others around them. They were defining what it means to be Catholic by their actions – and what they are.

Who do you say that you are?