

Catholics and Christians

Overview

In a recent RCIA class, someone asked what was the difference between Catholics and Christians. Coming from another faith this is not an unusual question.

What is the history of Christianity?

Almost 2000 years ago, Jesus walked the earth and revealed Himself as the Son of God. In doing so, He asked His followers to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth. In the first century the followers of Jesus became known as “people of the way” – because of the special way in which they acted.



In Acts 11:26 we see the first use of the name for Christians in the 1st century - "... For a whole year they met with the church and taught a large number of people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians."

What is a Christian?

Simply stated – a Christian is a follower of Jesus. Sometimes you may hear the word disciple which also means – follower. When Jesus did His public ministry he was followed by people who marveled over what he had to say – and hoped that He may be the long awaited messiah. If you recall the account in the Gospels when Jesus fed thousands of people with a few loafs of bread and a few fish – these are those followers who wanted to hear what Jesus had to say.

Who are Christian believers?

Christianity has many followers of Jesus. In a world population of about 6.5 billion people,

Christians account for about 2 billion of these people. Of this total about 1.2 billion are Catholics and the remainder are various Protestant religions – and all are Christians.

Catholicism consists of both the East and West churches due to a split in the 11th century over differences in doctrine. Roman Catholicism is known as both the Western Church and also as the Latin Rite. Several splits and schisms occurred creating both Catholic and Protestant churches. There are several churches which are Catholic – and generally in full communion with Roman Catholicism – but with a few different beliefs.

All protestant churches which are considered Christian have Catholic roots. Martin Luther started this schism in 1517, which was later followed by the Church of England (1534), Calvinism (1536) and other sects. For the first 1500 years, the Catholic Church was the only game in town. Unfortunately, in some ways, it acted this way and abuses crept into the church. The abuses lead to schisms and splintering of the faith.

Catholicism is the fullness of Christianity

While there are many Christian sects, this does not mean Catholics are “better” than everyone else. Catholics simply worship Jesus in the fullness of what He taught to His early followers. Some of those key differences between Catholics and Protestants can be summed up as follows:

- Belief in the True Presence of His Body and Blood in the Eucharist
- Celebration of the 7 Sacraments – which have scriptural foundations
- Allegiance to the Pope as the spiritual leader for the Catholic Church as the Apostolic Succession from Saint Peter
- Recognition that the deposit of faith comes from both the bible and tradition