

Why am I still Catholic?

Fr. Michael Tracey

Recently, I finished teaching a six-week course on “The Creed” both in Ocean Springs and Pass Christian. Unlike school children, the participants kept asking me, “What is our homework?” I had to bow to their wishes and decided to give them an assignment. The assignment was both for their own reflection and to enhance my own wisdom. I asked the participants to write a reflection paper on “Why am I still Catholic?”

In order to get them started on their paper, we engaged in a brainstorming session. The purpose of the session was to generate some ideas among the participants. Some wondered why I included the word, “still” in the question. Obviously, my intention was to get them to think a little deeper about the implications of the questions for their own lives.

Looking through the more than sixty reflection papers, I noticed some common threads. Some were “cradle Catholics” and felt comfortable staying with their Catholic faith. Others were raised in a different faith which, during their adult lives, didn’t seem to answer their deepest longings. Some, originally of other faiths, married a Catholic and gradually gravitated toward the Catholic Church. Others left the Catholic Church during their young adult years and went to various other churches to find some answers to their deepest longings. Eventually, they returned to the Catholic Church. Some got involved in various movements, most notably the Cursillo Movement and Charismatic Movement that enriched their lives at key moments.

Charles, raised in the Lutheran faith married a Catholic. She died later. He remarried again – another Catholic girl. Eventually, she started going back to her church again. He joined her. “No one ever asked if I were Catholic,” he says, “then I realized that it didn’t matter that I was not Catholic. They didn’t know and I didn’t tell them. I was accepted and welcomed as a Christian. This was all well and fine until one Sunday at Mass the homily was about ‘How do you look at yourself, not in the mirror but from the inside.’ That’s when I said to myself that I am putting up a front. Everyone thinks I am a Catholic on the outside, but I know on the inside that I was not.”

Katherine wrote, “It might be more accurate to ask ‘Why am I Catholic again?’ I became Catholic when I was five years old. My mother converted from the Lutheran church. When I was a teen, we stopped going to the Catholic Church and I went to church of many different denominations... I always felt as though something was missing from the Protestant services. As I became an adult, I drifted back to the Catholic Church. I realized that I missed the Mass and especially the Eucharist.”

Laura, a cradle Catholic, mentioned that her pastor asked her to coordinate the RCIA. “This journey of faith over the last 10 years has been such a gift. Sharing my faith and have the inquirers share their faith with me has been so rewarding. Each week, I learn more about the Catholic faith. I’m finally asking the questions. And by searching, questioning and prayer, I have really discovered what the Catholic Church believes and what I believe. I now know what I believe and why I believe it. I have *confirmed* faith. And as a result, my faith has grown by leaps and bounds and has enriched my life in so many ways.”

Esther, a devout and practicing Catholic for 74 years, said, she has “shared Mass and fellowship in many states and 26 foreign countries. I found unity in worshipping. I missed my Latin Mass after Vatican II and would probably have left the Roman Catholic Church if Bishop Lefebvre had been nearby. I realize what I though were fundamental changes were not. The church will always be in flux because man is in charge... to be able to receive the Eucharist often, to be able to attend Mass every day – if I wish, and to be made aware of my sins by self-examination before confession keeps me in the church.”

As I read through all the reflection papers, I realize that the Lord not only walks with us in the cool of our evenings but also during the heat of our days.