

## **I was raised Catholic – You too? Maybe Time to Reconsider**

by Mike Cousineau

Christian denominations speak to knowing the Truth, and rightly so! All Christian denominations have, at least, some truth. For instance, every denomination is in total agreement with, “The purpose of man is to know, love & serve God.” However, with over 35,000 so-called Christian denominations, is it possible that some of them teach in error, even though there is no intent to mislead?

Many people enjoy pondering “deep things.” Are you, perhaps, one of them? Take, for instance, this philosophical adage, “There are none so blind as those who will not see.” Haven't we all thought something to be true, only to find out we were misled?

When someone is nearing the end of life, typically, the family doctor will say, “it's best you get your house in order.” What, exactly, does that imply? Of course, he is confirming there is not much time left. If final arrangements haven't yet been addressed, get busy! Say your last goodbyes, tell your friends and loved ones how much you love them, and if you have not made a last will & testament, don't put it off any longer. Finally, the doctor may be implying if you haven't made peace with God, now would be a good time.

It would be great if all of us were given those final days to get it all squared away. Unfortunately, experience, otherwise known as real life, has shown, over and over again, that unexpected tragedies frequent every day life all too often. We could even make a case that far too many die young.

Because tragedy and unexpected suffering will visit all of us, many may “shake their fist at God.” Going through the stages of grief, they will probably say, “If you really are a loving God, why did you let this happen?” When this happens, it does not surprise God, nor does it get Him angry or upset. Believe it or not, He will use this suffering in a way to work it all out in the end.

*Nearing the end of life...that's where we started this, didn't we!* The Doctor was telling us to get our house in order. Christians believe God is constantly calling us to get our house in order. Keep in mind, Jesus would prefer we always have &

keep our house in order. Yet, He understands we struggle in our battle with the very real desires of the flesh. Because He understands how intense the battle can be, He orchestrated a plan, put it in place & gave it a name.

The name He gave it is The Church. Scripture specifically says, “The pillar and foundation of truth is The Church.” However, with so many denominations to choose from, what church is Jesus talking about? Remember, all denominations believe they speak & teach truth. Common sense tells us, if there are that many churches, all claiming correct interpretation of truth, they all can't be right. Some of them are in error, not intentional mind you, but nonetheless in error.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, the Catholic Church is the one, true church that Jesus started & Jesus still leads that very same church today. Some who read this document may cringe at this proposition, thinking they just can't, even for the sake of argument, believe the Catholic Church could be the gate-keeper for the fullness of truth. Fair enough, that thinking is understandable, as there are many firmly entrenched in the camp of anti-catholic. However, if because there are so many denominations, all believing they teach nothing but truth, you know in your heart, something just isn't right about this.

If we agree, something can't be right, then we must ask ourselves the following questions: 1) Who started the church you attend? 2) When did he start this church? 3) Why did he start a new denomination...was it because of disagreement with the authority of his previous church? 4) What denomination was he before he started the new church? These are all fair questions, especially because The Catholic Church claims Jesus, Himself, started theirs. Cardinal Newman, a former Anglican Minister, after he studied himself out of his Protestant Church & into the Catholic Church, said this, “to be deep in history is to cease being Protestant.”

If you are not Catholic & reading this document, you are very likely emotionally engaged, because of Cardinal Newman's quote. You may even be angry enough to crumple this letter up & toss it in the waste basket. However, you shouldn't, as the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart, suggesting this argument is worth checking out. Matter of fact, your goal may now be to continue reading, allowing you to seek out and destroy this decidedly Catholic position of Cardinal Newman. Great idea, please look up some of the early church fathers (Clement of Rome; Ignatius

of Antioch; Justin Martyr; & Irenaeus of Lyons) to see what Christianity looked like right after the death and resurrection of Jesus, thus ensuring, in your mind, which denomination holds the correct interpretation of truth. You will find they are not only disciples of the Apostles (Peter, John, James, etc.), they will appear to be decidedly Catholic.

You will find that Justin Martyr wrote a letter to the Emperor, Augustus Caesar, describing what the Christian Church looked like in the year 150A.D., as the letter describes what took place when the early Christians met. Believe it or not, what he is telling the emperor appears to be an almost exact representation of how the Mass is celebrated today. It's actually scary when you read these first disciples for the first time, as they begin to poke holes into what we had already thought was truth.

For those of you that were Catholic or were baptized Catholic & now attend a Protestant Church, you might say no way, this can't be true...I didn't get anything out of the Mass. Or, if you find yourself reading this letter as a Catholic, you might echo the same sentiment of getting nothing out of Mass. If you fit into either of the aforementioned categories, you would also lament the Mass is boring. These are typical reactions for those who have stopped attending church altogether, or you have started attending a different denomination. Lastly, you definitely don't like the idea of the Catholic Church making it mandatory, an obligation if you will, that you attend Mass each Sunday & on Holy Days of Obligation.

Let's take a closer look at these misunderstood complaints:

1. "I don't get anything out of going to Mass."

The truth is we are not supposed to attend church with the attitude of getting something out of it. Rather, we are to attend church with an attitude of thanksgiving to God, because Jesus paid a price He did not owe & we owed a price we could not pay. We go to give thanks and offer ourselves unto God as a living sacrifice, with the same attitude of Mary, when she said to the angel, "do unto me as you will."

When the Priest invites us to "lift up your hearts", we respond with, "we lift them up to the Lord." That, in a nutshell, is why we go to church. When we take the Mass seriously, we are, in essence, saying to God, "I offer myself back to you...you

gave me life...use my life as you see fit...I need you to be Lord of my life...I don't do such a great job when I'm in control...Jesus, I need you to be Jesus to me.”

When we go to Mass with an attitude of thanksgiving, we will get plenty in return. We get as up close and personal with God as humanly possible, while still here on earth. We receive Jesus, in Holy Communion, body, blood, soul and divinity. If this is true (check what those early church fathers had to say about this), & Holy Communion is not merely symbolic, as Protestant Churches teach, why would anyone want to stay away? St. Augustine called Holy Communion the food of immortality. John's Gospel puts it like this, “unless you eat my flesh & drink my blood, you have no life in you.”

## 2. “The Mass is Boring.”

Attitude is everything. If you go to Mass with an attitude of thanksgiving instead of “have to”, you will find the Mass come alive with opportunity for getting right & staying right with God. Because the entire Mass is a prayer, getting you ready to receive Jesus in Holy Communion, if you engage in each part with a heart that wants to please God, you will stop being self-centered & three things will become a must in your life: 1) You will stop trying to please yourself. 2) You will stop worrying what others think of you. & 3) You will now want to please God.

## 3. “Why attending Mass is obligatory.”

Let's start with some questions: What are your hobbies? What do you really like to do? Are you passionate about anything? It makes no difference what your passions are, there is always a cost associated with hobbies, likes & passions. I wish my YMCA membership was free. I would love to golf, all summer, with no cost. I'd really love it, if every time I took my wife out for dinner, there would be no charge & I didn't have to leave a tip.

Wouldn't it be great if someone else paid for my vacations? Shoot, as long as I am dreaming, I may as well dream big. How about the utilities, gas bill, cell phone bill, taxes, insurance and any other expense I have, if they were all written off! You get the picture, nothing is free.

Consider this, scripture says without holiness, no one will see the kingdom of heaven & nothing unclean will enter heaven. Keep in mind that holiness and

clean, as written in Revelation, are one and the same. How do we attain this holiness status & what is the cost? We have already established nothing is free, as everything has a cost. You see, that's the genius of the Catholic Church. The Church offers saving grace, just for attending Mass, which is considered perfect worship, at no cost, absolutely free. Keep in mind we're talking about The Church "making" you go to Mass. There is definite irony here!

Of course, every church will tell you Jesus already paid the price for our salvation & that is the absolute truth. However, where each church differs is in how holiness is achieved. In other words, what do we have to do in order to obtain the necessary grace, which ultimately leads to holiness, enabling entrance into heaven? This would be called getting your house in order!

Here is where researching the early church fathers becomes necessary. All churches do not agree on how the necessary grace is achieved. Some will say you must "accept Jesus as Lord" in order to receive this grace. When did this teaching come into some of those 35,000 denominations? What if it wasn't there in the beginning? What was the teaching in the beginning? Who is right, which denomination teaches the fullness of truth? All of these questions are fair & need to be asked by all of us.

Many of the churches disagree on baptism, communion, Mary, the Pope, Scripture Alone, Faith Alone, Purgatory, Sacraments, Gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc. What does the Catholic Church say...not what you have heard someone else say about the Catholic Church, but what does the Catechism of the Catholic Church say? Consider yourself challenged to research your church doctrine along side Catholic Church doctrine. Look at what other churches teach & compare it to the Catholic Church.

Now, let's once again, for the sake of argument, say the Catholic Church is absolutely the Church Jesus started and He said, "The gates of hell will not prevail against it." And He followed this with these words, "I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age." He further said to His Church, "I will lead you into all truth." Then He followed that up with a prayer to Our Heavenly Father and said, "Make them one Father, even as we are one." We then would ask ourselves, "what Church did Jesus say these things to?"

Let's go back to the question of how are we going to attain enough grace for eternal life? The Catholic Church would say, "saving grace is received through the Sacraments. You will receive the necessary grace by attending Mass, as the Mass offers the source and summit of the faith, otherwise known as Holy Communion." We must discern, if Holy Communion really is the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus, then it is the "game changer of game changers." And, yes, going to Mass & receiving Holy Communion are free.

Attend with a grateful heart, give thanks for the sacrifice Jesus made and walk away with a blessing from God, as that is what happens at every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Please understand, the Church knows how mankind is & like a Father who disciplines his own child, The Church makes attending Mass necessary, as it is for our own good!

To put all this in easy-to-understand terms: If Catholicism is true, to be in-step with the Church is to be in-step with God. For those who have left the Catholic Church and for those who no longer attend church, if you dare do the research on church history, you will find two things: First, The Catholic Church is the pillar and foundation of truth. Secondly, You will not attend Mass because you have to, you will attend because you want to.

The sole intent of this piece of correspondence is to ensure we all have our house in order, because the day will come when our life is required & we will all stand before God and give an account for the life we choose to live. May each one of us continually seek truth & may we all live as though we will stand before God today, because "there are none so blind as those who will not see"!