



# Eight Reasons to Reconnect With Your Catholic Faith

Some people are thinking about returning to a more active practice of their Catholic faith. Perhaps you are one of them. The list below offers eight reasons why reconnecting with the beauty and richness of your Catholic faith may be advantageous to you.

## 1. A timely opportunity to mature in your faith

For many of us Catholics, faith was authentic, but it was also passed down from our parents and grandparents. We certainly benefitted from this, but more as recipients than as active participants. Perhaps we even celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation as teenagers, but still we were on the receiving side.

Isn't it like that with a lot of things? It's how we receive language, everyday skills, our position in the family or the classroom, even, at times, our occupations. We get into things, receive them, but we don't think about them. Then, one day a light turns on and we understand things more from the inside than the outside, more as active participants, more as mature adults.

Faith is no exception to this rule. Faith, received from the outside, cannot grow and have its full force in our lives until we accept it inside, understand it again, experience it from a deeper perspective. More than anything, what we experience when that light turns on is an overwhelming sense of God's total love, and a desire to respond to that love and live in that love. Sometimes this happens on retreats, or at moments of crisis, or when we are involved in a renewal movement. Sometimes it happens in quiet prayer, as the Spirit awakens in us a deeper faith in Jesus Christ. Yet these moments of renewal are only a beginning; our faith still has not yet found its full force in our lives.

Reconnecting with our Catholic faith helps us rediscover its beauty and truth and gives us a chance to claim it more deeply for ourselves.

## 2. A new appreciation of Catholicism

Although the fashion of society is to think of all faith—all religious expressions—as the same, this cannot be true. After all, some faith expressions seem to contradict other faith expressions—either Jesus is divine or he is not; either faith contradicts reason or it does not.

Reconnecting with your Catholic faith can bring a renewed appreciation of what Catholicism, distinctly, has to offer modern believers: 1) a tradition that goes back to the Apostles themselves; 2) an expression of faith that appreciates reason; 3) a range of spiritualities over twenty centuries of Christianity; 4) the discipline and challenge of the seven sacraments, particularly the Holy Eucharist; 5) a Church with authority, which does not abuse that authority, but leaves plenty of room for individual expression; 6) a faith that is not trapped either in the next world or in this world, but relates each to the other in hope; 7) an approach to Scripture that allows for non-literal understanding; 8) an institution that, while open to change, does not flap with the latest wind; and 9) most of all, the assurance of our communion with God, in Jesus and the Spirit.

We have often taken our Catholic faith for granted, overlooking its particular vibrancy and distinct gifts. Reconnecting with the Church can help us appreciate Catholicism's gifts.

### **3. The challenge of modern discipleship**

Reconnecting with the Catholic Church can offer you a new perspective on being a Catholic—the opportunity to think of yourself as, and to respond to God as, a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ. This means that your experience of the Catholic faith will become more personal as you grow in your relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Modern discipleship integrates our hearing of God's word in the Scriptures with our prayer life; our prayer life with our moral life lived in relationship to others; and our personal decisions understood as a response to others in service, just as Jesus responded to the needs of those around him by serving them.

Discipleship is a way to bring new meaning to the stories of the saints we probably heard as children—St. Francis, St. Anthony, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Augustine, or St. Teresa. We understood holiness in these people as a call to exceptional living. Discipleship helps us translate that call to our everyday life and to our personal relationships.

### **4. The opportunity to provide a heritage for your children**

Adults, for some reason, are willing to do things with their own lives that they would never remotely consider for their children. How many of us will down pizza and cheeseburgers but insist that our children's diet be composed of grilled chicken and salad? We dread the thought that our children might, in their teen years, do the very same things that we did. In short, there is hardly a more natural impulse than to want to provide the best and the most for our progeny.

In religious terms, people seem willing to experiment with one or another religious expression—or even no religious expression—but hesitate to pass on the same blur of values to their children. They want, instead, something clear, deep, and strong for their children. They want to see them receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, make First Holy Communion, be confirmed, and attend a Catholic school or a parish religious education program.

Yet many of these very good intentions lie dormant because children have a hard time picking up values that their parents do not live. Reconnecting to your Catholic faith gives you the opportunity to provide a solid religious heritage for your child. Children today are besieged with options and pressures that make those of the 1960s and 1990s pale by comparison. What better way to provide children with the value system they need to negotiate this pressure-filled world of growing up than with a faith rooted both in good intentions and in solid practice?

### **5. An alternative to modern commercialism**

Reconnecting with our Catholic faith will also provide modern people with perspective as they confront the commercial bombardment of everyday life. If someone knew nothing of the values of today's society and only observed the lives of people, that person would likely conclude that people live to make money (as much as possible) and to spend money (as much as possible). People live today suspended between their income and their credit cards, often with the credit cards winning out. Such an economic, commercial view of life has two powerful consequences: 1) we tend to evaluate other people (and expect to be evaluated ourselves) primarily on the basis

of income or socio-economic level; and 2) we tend to overdo our work while underdoing the building of relationships.

Such a rat race is exhausting. It also seduces many into a viewpoint that robs people of the time and energy they need to put into their families, their friends, their expression of faith, and even their civic duties. Yet often only a profound experience of faith, and a reprioritizing of our lives on the basis of faith, can offset today's enormous seduction to live mostly for money and what money can buy.

Catholicism does not call us to be monks. But it does call us to evaluate our possessions in light of the most important values of life, not only our own comfort but the common good of humankind and the stewardship of earth's precious resources in view of the rights of generations yet to come. Reconnecting with faith may help us see what we really need, and what we really don't need, because our faith can help us see life, and humankind, from the viewpoint of God.

## **6. A personal prayer life**

Reconnecting with our Catholic faith can help us begin a process whereby we reclaim our lives for important things, particularly something like prayer. Although many people report praying every day, how deep would most of that prayer be? Would it not most likely be asking for one thing or another from God, things both profound and things quite trivial? Would it not tend to be self-centered, or at least driven by our own needs?

How refreshing and renewing, then, would it be to come to know God more deeply, simply for the sake of relating to and adoring God more fully? How different would it be for prayer to begin to pull us out of ourselves because it draws us more clearly to God? How powerful and different would our lives be if we opened ourselves to the all-loving, compassionate, and merciful God, in humility, expectation, and joy?

Many people have complained that their church did not help them know God—but these same people often never even got to first base with the spiritual life their church was fostering. Certainly many Catholics have dismissed the Catholic Church without ever having lived a Catholic life and, more particularly, without ever having undertaken the beginnings of a Catholic life of prayer. Reconnecting to our faith can connect us to this living stream of prayer which, having sustained twenty centuries of believers, can sustain us, too.

## **7. A resource for life's greatest decisions**

How many important decisions will be made in one person's life? While we might immediately say "dozens," the truth is that we only make a few major, life-shaping decisions. Who are friends are; what we will do in life; where we will live; whether we will marry and, if so, who; what we will live for; what we are willing to die for; and, perhaps, how we will die.

Lots of people avoid these kinds of decisions. Lots of people allow themselves to drift in various directions, sometimes aimlessly, hoping that things will simply work out. But just about every major decision we make in life would be enriched enormously by a perspective of faith. And few things even claim to address life's ultimate meaning, and the prospect of life beyond death, as religion does.

Catholicism, with its spiritual traditions, communal associations, sacramental celebrations, prayer expressions, and its teaching on salvation can bring powerful resources to these few, decisive

issues that shape human life. With life as unclear as it inevitably will be, why not bring to it as much light and direction as we can? Ultimately our lives will be boiled down to the decisions we have made and the loves to which we have committed ourselves. The judgment about our life, too, will come down to these few, essential choices. We can try to muddle through these burning questions alone, or we can address them with confidence and joy through the abundant resources of our Catholic faith. When God has given us so much, why try to do it alone?

## **8. A sure way to attain eternal life with God in heaven**

Of all the reasons to reconnect with our Catholic faith, one is especially worth pondering: our eternal destiny. At some point each of us will face our own death. What lies beyond the grave? The teachings of the Catholic Church give us a marvelous sense of hope. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, each person has the possibility of living in communion with God in heaven for all eternity. The first preface for the Catholic funeral Mass states this mystery in these poetic words: “Father, all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. In him, who rose from the dead, our hope of resurrection dawned. The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality. Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.”

Following Jesus as his disciple in the Catholic Church provides a way to begin our eternal destiny now, in our daily lives. Growing in holiness involves living the virtues of faith, hope, and love—virtues that connect us to God—even as God draws us more deeply into divine life through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The power and union that the Spirit brings in this life is only a foretaste of the fullness of life that God promises us in heaven.