

Reasons I'm a Better Christian as a Catholic



When I decided, as an Evangelical Protestant, to become a Catholic it was for a myriad of reasons. The appeal of the ancient tradition, the beauty of the Liturgy, and the succinct, coherent theology are only a few of the compelling aspects that drew me in. There are many more. But what I did not realize, as I began my first tentative steps to cross the Tiber, was how becoming a Catholic would utterly change my Christian life. In ways that I, then, could never have imagined.

Now, as a Catholic, I can say without qualification that I have become a better Christian. Truly, that I am a better Christian as a Catholic.

Let me tell you why.

Clearer Vision of Sin

Although it's difficult, and unfair, to look back on the past through our postmodern lens and criticize those that have come before us it seems safe enough to say that the Christian Church—and Catholics in particular—haven't always had the most succinct and appropriate view of sin.

In the past, in many contexts, sin would've been that black cloud held over the heads of Christians. The kind of thing beat out with a switch. Those nasty habits that will damn you straight to Hell without passing "Go."

That is to say, in the past, we've been guilty of over-emphasizing sin and under-emphasizing God's mercy and love. The balance is always hard to maintain.

But, as a Catholic, I've come to have a much clearer vision of sin, and how to live in God's graces, than I ever had as an Evangelical.

This is, I think, partly to do with the beautiful grace of the confessional. Here I'm truly and deeply accountable for my sins. I have to speak them out loud and then I'm forgiven (by God through the priest).

For my Evangelical friends who've never experienced this grace: I cannot describe it. But the mere existence of a mechanism (confession) by which I'm accountable for my sins to more than just myself and by which I can receive complete and utter forgiveness makes the reality of sin that much more tangible in my own life.

It makes me that much more aware of my shortcomings and that much more likely to deal with them straight-on.

This beautiful, grace-filled vision of the reality of sin makes me a much, much better Christian.

Reverence for God in Worship

As an Evangelical, my faith community was often teased about making Jesus too much of a “best friend” and not enough of a Lord. While the criticism always strung I’ve come to realize—now, on the other side of the discussion—that there’s a lot of merit in it as well.

Jesus is our Lord and I’ve been guilty, as an Evangelical, of sometimes not taking that seriously enough.

(For the record, there are plenty of Catholics who face down the same problem, too.)

All that to say, as a Catholic I’ve been better able to position myself appropriately in my relationship with God.

Jesus, as close as my best companion, but God most worthy of our adoration.

These things are held in beautiful balance in the Catholic faith tradition.

In the Mass, as I’ve written elsewhere, God is so tangibly and magnificently praised through our words and actions so as to make his majesty truly present. Likewise, in Eucharistic Adoration God is closer than I could’ve ever imagined as a non-Catholic. A mind-boggling closeness. Talk about best friend.

This beautiful balance of holy reverence for the Creator of the universe coupled with the closeness of a personal Lord and saviour has made me, as a Catholic, a much better Christian.

Globally-Minded Christianity

I don’t think any reasonable Christian surveying the landscape of the Church would be comfortable saying that this is how God intended us to be.

If the weary world is supposed to know that we’re Christians by our love what exactly is our disunity and division telling of?

As an Evangelical after years of reading and research and dialogue I decided that the Catholic Church best fit what I understood the historical Christian Church to be. That is, I came to believe that the Catholic Church was, ultimately, what Jesus founded in those very early days with his apostles. A Church with its arms back into the very beginning of time and its future divinely destined by the Holy Spirit.

What I didn’t anticipate, however, in joining the Catholic Church was just how catholic it would be. Too often, I think, I was guilty of living within my tiny little Christian sects. Too often it was the small communities that I belonged to, as a Christian, that defined my theology, my faith, and my worldview. Our issues were tiny, for the most part, and when we did try to dip our toes into the broader streams of the world we found it difficult and disconnecting.

Of course, this isn’t the experience of all Evangelicals, but it was often mine.

Now, as a Catholic, I’ve joined the largest Christian church in the world—and it feels enormous indeed. Think about it this way: The leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, barely speaks English.

To me that’s an asset.

Because Christianity ought to be global and our Church ought to be broad and its perspectives varied. The world is much larger than my North American, or Western framework, and it’s a good thing to be constantly shaken out of it.

I love my big my Church is and such an expanded theological, sociological, and spiritual worldview has made me, as a Catholic, a much better Christian.

Communion of the Saints

As an Evangelical, I’d read pieces of Scripture like, “Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses,” with a certain level of curiosity.

I remember, once, during a Sunday night family Bible study asking a Pentecostal pastor exactly what that text meant.

He stood perplexed, and then dismissed my question as somewhat unimportant.

A decade later, and I'm finally finding a meaning that makes sense, and satisfies.

As a Catholic, the Communion of Saints makes sense. It's present from the very beginning of Christianity; it's in our very earliest Creeds. It's in the very bedrock of our Christian identity even if it has been shed in the recent centuries by much of the Western Evangelical church.

But here's the thing: How much better of a Christian am I surrounded by such an incredible community of saints? How much more meaningful is my walk with God when I can not only ask my friends in there here-and-now to pray for me but, likewise, my friends in the great thereafter.

I can be friends with saints.

After all, didn't Jesus come to conquer death?

Not only has my Catholicism given me a much larger perspective on the living world, it's given me a profoundly richer view on the world of those that have gone before.

Focus on Prayer

The wealth of prayer I've found myself tapping into as a Catholic has been truly enormous.

In the Catholic faith tradition, the Mass itself is a kind of prayer, the fundamental prayer of the Church from which all things flow. And things flow indeed.

As a Catholic I've discovered the incredible beauty of the prayer of the Rosary. I've embraced the rich tradition of praying the Liturgy of the Hours. And I've come to see how prayer, in its widely varied forms, can truly permeate all aspects of my Christian life.

On the average day there's a prayer in my pocket (in the form of the Rosary) that I can tangibly touch, and feel, and pray.

There are the beautiful Hours that can be prayed, often throughout the day, which link me, as a Christian, with a beautifully ancient tradition—and with millions of others praying those same prayers all day long.

And, simply, in my conversations with the saints, in my simple requests for prayers throughout the course of a difficult day, I feel closer and closer to living a more prayerful life.

I love that I can dip my toe into a stream of Christian prayer which has its origins at the beginning of Christianity itself, or even earlier. I love that I've found new and enriching ways to grow deeper in my prayer life. And I love that I've done it as a Catholic.

I'm a Better Christian as a Catholic

As a younger Evangelical, I was amongst the first to throw stones at my Catholic brethren. In fact, there were times and situations in which I wouldn't even have considered them to be Christians.

Catholics aren't Christian.

And, sure, some likely aren't.

But that needn't be the case. My life, I hope, and my experience should serve to provide a contrasting picture against the one that many of us might have. My experience and many others, I should add.

The Catholic life, lived to its fullest, has been so incredibly enriching to me and my faith. Through a deeper focus on prayer, through my experience living amongst the saints, through a more global perspective, a deeper reverence for God in worship, and through a much more healthy and hearty view of sin I've become, far and away, a much better Christian than I ever thought I could be.

And, by the grace of God, I'll continue to learn and grow.

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