

— Lesson 1 —

WHY BE CATHOLIC AND NOT JUST CHRISTIAN?

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord Jesus, through the Church you give us a home, a mother, a teacher, the fullness of truth, and even your living Body. Give us eyes to see the gift that is our Catholic Faith. May the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church come alive for us and give us confidence to trust in the wisdom and authority that come from Jesus himself. Through the sacraments, may we experience the fullness of life that they open for us. Give us ears to hear, Lord. Amen.

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Fr. Mike's Thought Train

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—BIG QUESTION—

What is the main difference between the Catholic Church and Protestant Christianity?

—SHORT ANSWER—

Authority

THE BREAKDOWN

➔ Authority means the Church has the ability to teach clearly.

➔ The Church is not invisible. Rather, the Church is an actual, visible body of believers with a visible structure and hierarchy established by Jesus and teaching in his name.

➔ The “Bible alone” (*sola scriptura*) is not enough. Not everything taught in the Bible is explicit—that is, spelled out directly and clearly. An authoritative interpreter is needed.

* *For example, over the early centuries of Christianity, the Church was called on repeatedly to explain what Scripture taught about Jesus’ nature—about his humanity and divinity.*

➔ God would not give us an infallible book about himself and his plan of salvation without an infallible interpreter. If he did, thousands of people would have thousands of interpretations of its meaning.

➔ The big difference between the Catholic Faith and Protestant Christianity: authority.

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WRITE IT OUT

1. What is Fr. Mike's main point about why be Catholic?

- a. Non-Catholics worship a different God.
- b. The authority of the Church comes from Jesus.
- c. Other religions are wrong.
- d. If you are raised Catholic, then you should remain Catholic to honor your parents.

Discussion Starter

Complete this sentence: I am Catholic because

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2. Where do we get the idea that Jesus founded the Church and gave it authority to teach in his name?

- a. From the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 14
- b. From Jesus himself in Matthew 16:18
- c. From a pope in an ancient letter
- d. From a dream that Fr. Mike had when he was fifteen

Discussion Starter

Why does it matter where this idea comes from?

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3. What are some of the examples Fr. Mike presents from history when the Church's clear authority was needed?

- a. The circumcision of Gentiles
- b. The controversy of Docetism
- c. The controversy of Arianism
- d. All of the above

Discussion Starter

Clear authority in the Church is needed so that

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4. Why is it important that the Church is “visible” rather than just “spiritual”?

- a. In order to continue publication of the Bible
- b. An invisible Church cannot teach with authority, so we would have competing interpretations of what to believe.
- c. Without visible buildings, the people of God couldn’t gather together.
- d. None of the above

Discussion Starter

Thought experiment: The administration, faculty, and staff of a high school decide to go on vacation for a month. They leave no one in charge, but instead leave a book of instructions on the doorstep of the school. What will they find when they get back?

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TALK IT OUT

- 5. Having an authority to settle disputes and to apply already-established rules is critical in our daily lives. Share a time when you were glad that there was an authority to settle a question or disagreement.
- 6. Fr. Mike said, paraphrasing G.K. Chesterton, “I don’t need a Church to tell me when I’m right; I need a Church to tell me when I’m wrong.” Discuss what this means.
- 7. Do you ever struggle with accepting the authority of the Church on a particular Catholic teaching? Based on Fr. Mike’s presentation, how could you resolve your struggle?
- 8. Have you ever had difficulty reading and interpreting the Bible? How does having a visible Church that teaches with authority help us understand the meaning of Scripture?

Hands On

“EGG DROP” ACTIVITY:

What happened? Write your interpretation here:

Food for Thought

1. Carefully and prayerfully read Matthew 16:13-19.

a. What event does the text describe?

b. What is God saying to you personally in this passage?

c. Write a short prayer to Jesus based on this passage.

2. What is your relationship with authority? How do you think you can grow in this area?

3. Reflect on your experience of being Catholic. What are some of the most memorable moments so far?

What do you love about the Church? What do you struggle with?

Closing Prayer

READER (MATTHEW 16:15-19)

"[Jesus] said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'"

LEADER

When Peter spoke the truth about Jesus' identity and mission, Jesus spoke the truth about Peter's identity and mission. Who Peter was and what he was called to do brought the reality of the Church into clear focus. The authority and mission of Peter came from Jesus himself. If we, like Peter, have the courage to answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?", then his response to us will be similar. Who we are and what we are called to do will become clear in the light of our Catholic Faith and our relationship to the Church. How do we answer Jesus' question to Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" Let's reflect on our answers, as Jesus invites us to a clearer identity and mission in his one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

[Pause for reflection.]

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.