

Why I Am Catholic

Misfits are welcome.

"The Island of Misfit Toys" is one of my favorite parts of the Christmas movie "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Santa, inspired by a rejected reindeer and an eccentric elf, goes to a place of broken toys—cast aside, ridiculed, and ignored by society—repairs them and finds them a new home. He shows love and concern, cares for them, and gives them hope. And then Rudolph, the Reject, and his red-nose save Christmas.

Many of us have experienced rejection because we were different than everyone else growing up: Non-athletic, too tall or too short, struggled in school, wore glasses, unique features, birth defects, special needs, etc. We have suffered scars and been wounded. "All of the other reindeer, used to laugh and call him names; they never let poor Rudolph play in any reindeer games." In the midst of that, Jesus comes who understands, wants to love, and wants to heal us and make us whole.

He does not treat us as misfits; he treats us as brothers and sisters. In Matthew 15:30-31, we are told: "Great crowds came to him, having with them the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others. They placed them at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see, and they glorified the God of Israel." (Gospel, 1st Wednesday of Advent)

Jesus came to form a Church of all people at different places on the journey of faith and life. The word Catholic means "universal." Some churches welcome only the wealthy, or the good looking, or the connected. Jesus welcomes everyone and forms a Church from His broken body on the cross to heal our brokenness. He is born in a stable to poor parents to remind us that, in our poverty, He is our wealth. He recruits fishermen, a tax collector, a prostitute, the blind and the lame to announce a message that the broken of today hear and proclaim, live and love.

Jesus also uses others to proclaim His message of hope. For Rudolph, he finds a friendly elf who identifies with his suffering and helps him overcome his fears. He also has a girlfriend named Clarice who stands by him and offers encouragement. "We all pretend/The rainbow has an end/And you'll be there my friend someday./There's always tomorrow,/For dreams to come true,/Tomorrow is not far away." (*Johnny Marks*)

The Church community is called to lift up those who are downcast and to help others to see that Christ is still with them in times of uncertainty. And to remind them that they are not the only misfit. In this world we will feel like misfits. At times out of place or not thinking and believing as the world thinks and believes. Christ reminds us: "Whoever rejects you rejects me." (Lk 10:16) Acts 4:11 tells us: "He is 'the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.'"

To the world Jesus was a misfit. He did not fit in. We will never fit in when it comes to the world. But we fit in with Christ. For we are made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), rejected by the world, welcomed in Heaven.