

Why I Am Catholic

The universality of the faith and the fact the Catholic Church is still standing after almost 2,000 years.

The word Catholic means "universal" or "comprehensive." Today there are more than one billion Catholics in the whole world. The church through its missionary activity has reached out to every place and every land. When the Vatican issues a document, it is usually published in more than 200 different languages.

The word Catholic is first used in the city of Antioch and is usually credited to St. Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop, theologian, and martyr for the faith.

The Catholic faith also has survived both internal and external strife. The Church has survived some major ups and downs because of God's guiding hand and the willing cooperation of the faithful. In the beginning the Church was under attack from the Roman government and Jewish leaders. The new Christian community was kicked out of the synagogues and the Temple and began gathering in homes. Persecution was constant and many became martyrs for refusing to worship the emperor.

As the external persecution died down in the early 300s, internal problems intensified as bishops, theologians, and other leaders argued over essential beliefs. The Council of Nicea in 325 produced the Nicene Creed, but the battle over beliefs continued for many years after. Heresies and misunderstandings led to a lot of internal conflict.

The Great Schism of 1054 separated east and west. The east separated over issues of doctrine, politics, culture, etc., and became known as the Orthodox.

In the Middle Ages, the church faced another major internal crisis when the French king convinced the Pope to move to Avignon, France. For 70 years the Bishop of Rome lived in another country. Finally when he returned, the French king decided to name his own pope creating a period of two popes followed by a shorter time when there were three men claiming to be the real Pope. The 1300s and early 1400s were very difficult times.

Then in 1517, Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation which led to the forming of new Christian denominations and the separation that continues today.

Despite all that, the Catholic Church has persevered and remained steadfast and unwavering in its beliefs. Every time there has been a challenge, the church has responded by addressing issues and explaining our beliefs in deeper ways out of new questions raised.

These are only a few of the challenges the Church has overcome. Today's greatest challenge comes from the battle over values and morals. Moral and spiritual truths are under attack and the Church stands firm as a protector of God's truth and a lighthouse of hope.