

The Trouble with Cradle Catholics

As a convert to the Catholic faith, I have been bothered by several conversations I've had with "cradle Catholics." So bothered, in fact, that this plea had to be written.

To me, to be born a Catholic would be such a honor and blessing. I am envious to those that have had the privilege. To be allowed to grow up in the faith, learning it day by day, would be easier than the searchings of my own life. For this reason it is difficult to understand Catholics who attend other churches, who don't attend Mass regularly, or who have not come to church in many years.

I have had conversations with persons that fall into each group. Each time I am shocked. How can this be? There is usually some little reason given. "Not enough music." "The priest made me mad." "I don't know anymore." "There's not enough time." "The other church teaches the Bible."

In a recent conversation, a woman, a "cradle Catholic," said she wished the Catholic Church had more music. She goes to another church that has such "wonderful music" that it clears your ears to listen to the Bible verses that follow. I wanted to say to her that doesn't she know that music can be very hypnotic with psychological effects? Music is a tool, an enchanter for what follows.

Entertainers and the media events have used it for years (work a crowd up or down). What I actually said was that all the other churches have been started by men. The Catholic Church is the Church ordained by Christ to Peter and his successors. And where else could you go to be in the living presence of Christ through the Mass?

I go to church to participate in the Mass that our Lord left for us to continually be in his presence and to have forgiveness for sins. I do not go for the music (although it is enjoyable), the people who are there (but I do have friends), or a certain priest (but my priests held the candle for my darkened path to the Church). I got to be with my Lord. When I'm at Mass, it is like I'm in a "bubble" directly linked to every part of the liturgy. How can it be otherwise?

Home. That is the only way to describe the completeness of my conversion to Catholicism. My journey home took too many years. Those years cannot be undone. I mourn for them. The search began as a child. The church of my parents did not fit me. There was an internal emptiness.

As a young girl out of college, I went to Mass. There were none of the obvious reasons to go. I was not engaged or dating a Catholic man. In fact, I was dating a devout Protestant. On two occasions I went to a priest about becoming a Catholic. For some reason those conversations never went any further.

I met and married my wonderful husband, had a son, joined a church because we both felt the need to be part of a church family. Those years were good years. The pastors were our friends, many of the members were close friends also. My heart said, "Not quite there yet." We went there for companionship, fun, and fellowship. That is not wrong. In fact, those are good qualities. But, something else must come first. The reason for going is not companionship, fun, and fellowship but the Way to God.

In 1988 my husband had serious medical problems. He was unconscious for several days in the intensive care unit of a local hospital with his life hanging in the balance. When he awoke, the first words he said were, "Get the monsignor; I think I'm Catholic." Through our special friends, who later became our Church sponsors, the monsignor came to the hospital. The journey began. My heart remembered all the old longings.

In 1989 another priest entered our lives. His patience was the nurturing factor in our journey. The decision was not quick nor was it sudden. We, as a family, discussed it over the years. Finally, my husband and I started attending RCIA classes. Our adult son joined us the following week. In 1994 we came as a family into our Church family. Again, there were no obvious reason for us to join. We were mature adults, comfortable in a lifestyle that had been developed over many years. It was somewhat uncomfortable to change. Friends were surprised. All I can say is that it was overdue.

This is why I cannot comprehend "cradle Catholics" who question our faith. It has always been theirs. I had to battle a lifetime to get it. Come back to what is yours, freely given from your birth. It already belongs to you. Don't be misled by churches of men. Don't let the "trims" of music, fun, and fellowship rob you of the completeness of our faith. Don't let the personalities of the various Protestant pastors be the criteria for membership.

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