

who answers the phone that you are interested in finding out more about the Catholic Church and they should be able to help you.

Entry into the Church for adults is now largely done through a process called the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). This RCIA is a gradual process that can be fitted to the needs of the individual and entering into it does not place any obligation at all on the enquirer. In general though, newcomers who choose to go forward are received into the Church at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday.

In closing I am reminded of a story about an old farm hand that I heard some time ago. This man had worked for a Catholic family for many years. When the family went to church on Sunday they would invite the farm hand along and he would go with them and over the many years that he worked for this family he did not show any inclination to actually go ahead and join the Church. Finally, when he was dying he asked to see a priest and when the priest arrived the old man asked if it was possible for him to join the church. The priest made the necessary inquiries of the old man and then baptized and received him into the Church. The good family that this old man worked for were astounded by all this and just before he died one of the family asked why he had waited so long before joining the Church. The old man's reply was very simple, "Nobody invited me to!" With the above example in mind, please accept my invitation to you, the reader, to come and find out what the Catholic Church is all about. If you like what you see the rest will be between you and God.

May God bless you in your searchings and be confident that you are in our prayers.

William J. Bradley

The following leaflets are also available and all of our leaflets are written by Roman Catholic authors::

Why do Catholics Venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary?
Praying the Rosary..
Is the Story of Fatima for Today?
Why Should I go to Mass on Sunday?
What is the Catholic Church Anyway?
What is the Holy Eucharist?
What is the Sacrament of Penance?
What is the Sacrament of Baptism?
What Happens to me When I Die?
Who is the Pope?

NOTE: If you would like to know more about the Roman Catholic Church, simply look up the one nearest you, in the Yellow Pages of any phone book, and enquire about the adult information courses that are available and offered without any obligation at all to the enquirer.

Internet email: catholic@catholicmissionleaflets.org

Web Page: <http://www.catholicmissionleaflets.org>

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CATHOLIC MISSION LEAFLETS

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APPROACHING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ..for the first time!



The purpose of this leaflet is to help you take those first steps toward exploring the Roman Catholic Church. Its purpose is not to provide an in depth exploration of the Church, but to simply help you get over that initial shyness we all feel when we start to investigate a new group.

It should be said, before going any further, that should you decide to join the Roman Catholic Church, the Church wants you to come of your own free will, after suitable study, reflection and prayer. Your application for entry must be free of any outside pressure from any source whatever so you have nothing to fear in that regard. The actual process of entry is entirely in your hands as to how long it takes and can vary

widely and the process will be briefly described toward the end of this leaflet.

It is always easier to go into a strange assembly of people, if you have a friendly face at your elbow to steer you in the right direction. So one of the easiest introductions to the Catholic Church is to ask a Catholic friend, if you have one, to take you to Mass with them one Sunday. Most Catholics that I know would be only too happy to take you to church with them and explain what is going on. This friend should also be able to introduce you to a priest, should you decide that you would like to know more about the Catholic Church.

If you do not have a Catholic friend, attending Mass is still one of the best introductions to the Church and going alone is not really difficult at all. Many non-Catholics experience a certain amount of apprehension about attending a Catholic Church but there is really nothing to fear. You will be able to understand what is being said by the Celebrant and besides, you probably won't be the only non-Catholic there. Many Catholics are married to non-Catholic partners and many of those partners go to Church with their Catholic husband or wife. There may also be enquirers like yourself there as well, some of whom attend Mass for some considerable time before going any further with their inquiries.

You will need to select the Church you wish to attend and generally, at the front of it somewhere you will find a notice board that lists the times of the Eucharistic Celebrations (Mass). When you have settled on a church and picked the time you wish to attend, it would be best if you got there about fifteen minutes early. Catholic churches like any other assembly, fill from back to front and most of the parishioners come into the church in the last five to seven minutes before Mass. So if you leave it until a moment or two before Mass, before entering the church you may be forced to move well down into the body of the church in order to get a seat.

Before going any further with this explanation I would like to just take a moment to make a suggestion to you. I don't know where you come from, what your background is or where you stand spiritually, but when you are looking at the Catholic Church you are looking at an expression of God on this earth and in our lives. So in order to help you understand what you are looking at, I would suggest that you invite God along to help you. If you are not a church going person this is not difficult, all you need to say, in your heart, is something like, "Dear God, help me with this please!"

The Mass or Eucharistic Celebration is the focal point of worship in the Roman Catholic Church and goes on seven days a week. In pre-Vatican II times, the Mass was celebrated

in Latin all around the world. A Catholic could walk into any church, anywhere in the world where Mass was being celebrated and know what was going on and what to do. In these times the Mass is now celebrated in the local language but the form of the celebration is generally uniform throughout the world so that after a moment or two, it is still possible to tell what stage the liturgy is at, even if the language is not understood. Each day of the year that the Eucharist is celebrated, there are parts of it that can be the same and parts of it that change. The portions that always change are the readings from the Old Testament, Psalms and the New Testament. As the days and seasons of the Church year pass, the readings and therefore the teachings retain a freshness and variety.

Once you are inside the body of the church, there is usually a small font of water at the head of the aisle or fastened to the rear wall of the church. This is Holy Water that is blessed during the Easter celebrations and is used throughout the year for baptisms, priestly blessings and for Catholics to bless themselves when they enter and leave church or at other times, by dipping a finger into the Holy Water and then making the sign of the cross on themselves. Some Catholics take some of this water home and use it in a small font just inside the main entry door of their home. Although I will describe this blessing for you, it is something that you need not do and nobody will notice.

The blessing is very simple and although it is associated with Catholics, any Christian could use it. You bring the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand together and then touch your forehead with their tips and say "In the name of the Father, (then touch the lower centre chest and say) and of the Son, (then touch the left shoulder and say) and of the Holy Spirit (then touch the right shoulder and say) Amen".

When Catholics enter their church and reach where they are going to sit, they will usually face the altar and go down on their right knee in a genuflection to the presence of Christ in the Holy Sacrament, reserved in the tabernacle on the altar. (Or it may be set of to one side of the church or the other.) Once again, if you come early or come with a friend, simply slip into the seat and make yourself comfortable.

You will probably notice hymn books and maybe a Sunday Missal in the book rack on the rear of the pew in front of you. Finding the announced hymns is fairly easy but unless someone shows you how to use a Missal you will find it difficult to work out where you are in the ceremony. It would be far better to sit back and take in everything that is going on around you. Most Catholics have the unchanging parts of the Mass memorized and may only use a missal for the Readings,

Psalms and Gospel as they are being read by the readers and/or the celebrant.

As the Mass begins with the entry of the Celebrant, the congregation will stand. From that time on the congregation will stand, sit, kneel and recite prayers out loud at varying times throughout the ceremony. It is not hard to follow the movements if you want to do that. Simply wait a moment to see what everyone else is doing and then do the same.

Recently I took a non-Catholic friend to a mid-day Mass at a city church. He was feeling a little nervous but everything went along just fine until that time in the Mass when just after everyone has recited the "Our Father" (The Lords Prayer) the Celebrant will invite everyone in the congregation to offer each other a sign of peace. I had completely forgotten to warn my friend and it shook him up for a moment until he realized that the people in the congregation were shaking each other by the hand, usually with a big smile on their faces and saying variations of "Peace be with you!" and my friend quickly joined in.

Shortly after everyone offers each other the sign of peace, you will notice everyone stand up, move into the aisle and then go forward, in turn, to the altar area where they will receive communion. The communion is in the form of a small circular wafer that will be given to each person by the Celebrating Priest or a Eucharistic Minister. In some churches you may notice that after the communicant receives the wafer, they may move to another Minister where they may take a cup into their hands and drink from it or be seen dipping their wafer into the cup and then consuming it.

This moment of communion is a solemn moment for Catholics because they believe that at this moment they are receiving the actual Body and Blood of Christ under the species of Bread and Wine. During this time you should remain in your seat, either sitting or kneeling, but under no circumstances should you go forward and receive communion at this time. However, you can go forward in the communion line, with your hands crossed on your breast, and the priest will bless you.

After everyone has received communion, the priest will return to the altar and clean the various vessels that he has used. This only takes a few minutes and the final prayers of the Mass will be said and the congregations dismissed with a blessing.

Should you decide that you would like to know more about the Roman Catholic Church, all you have to do is phone the rectory of the Catholic Church nearest to you and ask to speak to the Pastor. If he is unavailable simply explain to the person