

and interesting activities. A Catholic Christian community is a group of people who gather around the person of Jesus Christ to worship God and live in the light of the Holy Spirit. Catholics come together at Mass, in the sacraments, and in parish activities to pray, to celebrate joys, to mourn losses, to serve others, to provide support, and to receive strength for daily life. A Catholic parish offers all of this — and much more — to people who recognize the importance of walking with others toward union with God.

2 Because they want to help other people. There are lots of opportunities within the secular world to volunteer. What's missing is the spiritual dimension that service within the Catholic Church provides. It's more than just a "feel-good" activity. It's part of the great commandment (see Mark 12:28ff) to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. In reaching out to others, Catholic volunteers become instruments of God's love. The Catholic Church offers opportunities to touch the lives of people at home or around the world.

1 Because they hunger for the Eucharist. Many people come back to the Catholic Church because they feel an intense longing for the Eucharist. Sometimes it happens at a wedding, a funeral, a baptism, a First Communion, or a confirmation. Sometimes it happens when people are alone or facing difficulties in life. They describe it as a deep hunger for the spiritual nourishment that comes when they receive the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. This hunger for the Eucharist triggers a recognition of the presence of Christ in other sacraments, which draws them even more deeply into the practice of their faith. It is, without exception, the number

one reason people come back to the Catholic Church.

Most people discover that coming back to the Church is not an event as much as it is a process that involves a little pain, a little laughter, some thinking, some prayer, some discernment, and a lot of letting go. "My actual return to full participation in a parish took about three years after I felt the first longing," one person admitted.

The Eucharist is the number one reason people come back to the Church.

And what do they get in return? The Catholic Church offers union with Jesus Christ in Scripture, in prayer, in the community of others, in the Eucharist, and in the other sacraments. It offers spiritual support in good times and bad. It offers divine wisdom that is thousands of years old. It offers meaning and purpose in this life and the promise of life after death.

You'll know you are home when you begin to feel a deep sense of peace.



Where to Go for More Information

Books:

- The New Catholic Answer Bible.* Our Sunday Visitor, 2005.
- Aquilina, Mike, and Regis Flaherty. *The How-To Book of Catholic Devotions.* Our Sunday Visitor, 2002.
- Dubruiel, Michael. *The How-To Book of the Mass.* Our Sunday Visitor, 2002.
- . *A Pocket Guide to Confession.* Our Sunday Visitor, 2007.
- . *A Pocket Guide to the Mass.* Our Sunday Visitor, 2007.
- Duquin, Lorene Hanley. *A Century of Catholic Converts.* Our Sunday Visitor, 2003.
- Madrid, Patrick. *Where Is That in the Bible?* Our Sunday Visitor, 1999.
- Smith, Claire Furia. *Catholicism: Now I Get It!* Our Sunday Visitor, 2006.

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You Can't Go Home Again is the title of a once-famous novel by Thomas Wolfe. There is deep wistfulness in his novel, for he believed that going home again is bound to be a great disappointment.

Not so with the Catholic Church. No matter how long you've been away, you can always come home. You can start coming to Mass. You can become a part of a parish community. You can enter into the faith far more deeply than when you left.

Chances are, you're already feeling a strange inner pull. No matter what anyone else tells you, the spiritual longing you feel is God trying to draw you back to himself. But God never forces. God only invites. Whether you return to the Catholic Church is a decision that only you can make.

There are as many reasons for coming back to the Church as there are people who left. While God is at the center of each person's decision to return, the circumstances are varied.

Here are ten reasons that influenced the decision of others to return to the practice of the Catholic faith.

10 **Because they want meaning in life.** In the hustle of today's busy lifestyles, lots of people suddenly realize that their lives have lost a sense of meaning or



purpose. They begin to ask themselves, "What is my life all about? Why do I do what I do?" There is widespread confusion in our culture with regard to morality and truth. The Catholic Church offers a beacon of light that gives meaning to our existence and leads to eternal life.

9 **Because childhood memories surface.** Some people say childhood memories of feeling connected to God surface in later life. They begin to ask themselves, "Is it possible to recapture that simplicity of faith? Can I ever really believe that God is watching out for me?" The secularization of our society leads people away from the spiritual side of themselves. The Catholic Church offers both religious and mystical experiences that feed the heart, the mind, the body, and the soul.

8 **Because they made mistakes.** Some people become burdened with the weight of accumulated sin. They want to get rid of the guilt of having hurt themselves or others. They begin to ask themselves, "Will God ever forgive me? Is there any way I can start over with a clean slate?" You can always tell God that you're sorry. But if you want the complete assurance of God's forgiveness and the grace to start again, the Catholic Church offers absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.



7 **Because they need to forgive others.** Sometimes people hold on to anger and resentment toward individuals who have hurt them deeply. Maybe it was a family member or a friend. Maybe it was someone or something in the Church.

Our modern culture condones and encourages anger and revenge. But hatred and bitterness are spiritual cancers that eat at the heart of a person. The Catholic Church pro-

"Will God ever forgive me?"

vides the opportunity to seek God's help in forgiving others, even when the other person does not ask for forgiveness or does not deserve it. The ability to forgive is a gift that opens a person's heart more fully to God's love and peace.

6 **Because they want to be healed.** Some people carry deep spiritual wounds. They struggle with anger at God over bad things — a terminal illness, a debilitating injury, a broken relationship, mental or emotional problems, an act of violence against an innocent person, an unexplainable accident, some natural disaster, the death of a loved one, or some other deep disappointment. The Catholic Church cannot change these situations or explain why they happened. But there are people in the Church who can assist in spiritual healing and help you get on with your life.

5 **Because the Catholic Church has the fullness of truth and grace.** Many people who leave the Catholic Church are blessed by the experience of worshiping for a while in another Christian denomination. But



some people come back when they realize that Catholicism has the fullness of truth and grace. The Catholic Church was not founded by a single reformer or historical movement. It is not fragmented by individual interpretation of Scripture. There are

thousands of Christian denominations, but only one Catholic Church, which has been guided and protected by the Holy Spirit from generation to generation for some two thousand years.

4 **Because they want their children to have a faith foundation.** Some people return to the Catholic Church because they recognize that raising children in a culture that promotes "doing your own thing" can lead to disaster. Children need to experience the spiritual dimension of life. They need a structured system of belief and a firm moral foundation that goes beyond human logic and reasoning. People return because they want a solid foundation upon which their children can build their lives.

3 **Because they want to be part of a faith community.** Many people seek a sense of belonging. But community is more than just friendly people, good sermons,

