

1. Why Be A Catholic Today?

1. Why Be a Catholic Today? by Jim Auer How do TV or the movies portray religion? Think about it! Whenever they want to bring up the subject of religion, they write a script that calls for a priest or a Sister. When the media bigwigs need a character to officially represent religion, they call on a Catholic. This isn't a new trend, either. Artworks, plays, and novels have done it for centuries. In the movies it's been going on at least since 1938 when Pat O'Brien played a kindly priest in the movie *Angels With Dirty Faces*. Ask your grandparents about that one! Then there was Bing Crosby's 1944 Oscar-winning portrayal of a priest in *Going My Way* (which also won the Academy Award for Best Film). The devil's opponents, when he possessed Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*, were two priests. Television has had more than its share of stories about priests and Sisters. Some, like Merlin Olsen's Father Murphy and Peter Falk's Father Noah "Hardstep" Rivers, have been the main character in the program. Countless others have played supporting roles, but there can be no doubt that Catholic priests and Sisters appear as characters in films and on TV programs much more often than religious leaders from any other Church or religious denomination. It also works in reverse. When the media needs a Representative-of-Religion-Gone-Wrong, the choice again is usually a priest or a Sister. More than one movie and plenty of TV programs have told the story of priests and Sisters who have fallen in love, broken their vows, inflicted pain and suffering on others, or been involved in financial misdeeds. Why do they always pick Catholic figures to represent religion? Good question. Is it that most priests and Sisters dress differently? Well, representatives of other faiths sometimes dress distinctively too. Is it that Catholicism is the major Christian religion in terms of numbers? (More than seventeen percent of the world population and twenty-two percent of the population of the United States are Catholic.) Or is there a general, unspoken feeling that somehow the Catholic faith is "the real thing" when it comes to religion? Why are you Catholic? All this makes interesting speculation, but there are more important, personal questions to consider. For example, how do you see your own Catholic faith? What images come to mind when you hear the phrase "the Catholic Church"? Why are you a Catholic today? Do you feel committed to the Church or do you sense that you are on the fringe? Do you think you'll still be a Catholic ten or twenty years from now? It's not likely that you are a Catholic because you chose the Catholic faith after a long, personal search. You are probably Catholic because at least one of your parents, if not both, is a Catholic, and that parent saw to it that you were baptized in the Catholic Church when you were still very young. Some people feel that infant baptism is a terrible injustice on the part of the Catholic Church, as though this practice is an attempt to hold a helpless kid a lifelong captive of the faith. But the same situation is found among people of many religious communities. Hundreds of thousands of young people were "born Methodist" or "born Baptist" or "born Hindu" and have been members of those communities ever since, whether they were officially baptized or initiated into the faith, or whether they just grew up in the faith under the influence of their parents. Sooner or later, however, you're going to need a better reason for being and remaining Catholic than simply because Mom, Dad, relatives, or friends are Catholic. When you make the choice to personally live your life as a Catholic and follow the laws and practices of the Catholic Church, then you can call yourself a mature believer. But if you want to find those better reasons, it's going to take a little work and study and thought. Right now your image and impressions of the Catholic faith and the institution called the Catholic Church have probably come from a rather limited number of people: your parents, the priests and Sisters you've met, teachers in Catholic schools or religious education programs, classmates and friends, and other members of your parish. You have probably also learned about the Church from some of the things you have read, like the Bible and religion textbooks. Retreats, Sunday sermons, and other religious services have also taught you something about the Church. Sometimes this has resulted in a wonderfully accurate representation of the whole Church and sometimes not. Some kids are "raised Catholic" mainly because their grandmothers would have "raised the roof" if they didn't go to church