

Catholicism Is, Most Importantly, An Experiential Faith

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A Catholic, baptized into the very life of Christ ([CCC 1213](#)), is invited to discover much more about God, Holy Scriptures, the saints and the traditions of his Church than dry facts because Catholicism is, most importantly, an experiential faith. Ironically, most Christians allow fear of deception to impede growth in the Spirit and hinder their participation in the mystical life of the Church.

To counter this self-defeating fear of any inner spirituality, St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis have repeatedly emphasized that Christianity is basically an encounter with Jesus.

Many people perceive Christianity as something institutional — rather than as an encounter with Christ — which explains why they don't see it as a source of joy. [Pope Benedict XVI](#)

The evangelization of the person and of human communities depends totally on this encounter with Jesus Christ. [Pope Benedict XVI](#)

We must always have the courage and the joy of proposing, with respect, an encounter with Christ, and being heralds of his Gospel. Jesus came amongst us to show us the way of salvation and he entrusted to us the mission to make it known to all to the ends of the earth. [Pope Francis](#)

Although Catholics are taught and encouraged to encounter Christ, most of us don't know how and think such intimacy is reserved for the saints of old. The fact is intimacy with Jesus should be the normal Christian experience because, by definition, a Christian is one who shares in the life of Christ.

A Two- Way Relationship

Think about this for a moment- if you do all the talking in a relationship with a friend and never giving them a chance to respond, do you think your friendship will ever develop? Yet this is precisely how the faithful usually relate to God. During prayer, we thank, praise and intercede for others. We do not expect to participate in a practical dialogue with the Living God as we pray, so we never stop talking long enough to listen. How can I obey God in my daily life, if I never expect to hear Divine requests and suggestions? Furthermore, if I refuse to engage in a dynamic relationship with Christ, can I even ever hope to live an authentic life as His Presence on earth?

Somehow we mistakenly believe the phrase “a personal relationship with Jesus” is a Protestant slogan even though it is proclaimed right in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The following excerpt clearly explains the importance of a relationship with God in the lives of Roman Catholics.

[A Personal Relationship with God \(CCC 2558\)](#)

The Church professes faith in the Apostles Creed (Part One) and celebrates faith in sacramental liturgy (Part Two) so the faithful might conform to God's will in the Ten Commandments (Part Three). To believe, celebrate, and live this mystery demands a personal relationship with the living God through prayer (Part Four). "Prayer is a surge of the heart, a simple look toward heaven, a cry of

recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy” (St. Therese of Lisieux).

From the Covenant with the Trinity (CCC 2564-2565)

Christian prayer is a Covenant relationship in Christ, springing from the Spirit and ourselves and directed toward the Father in union with Christ’s human will.

Prayer is the living relationship of the children with the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Kingdom is “the union of the entire Holy Trinity with the whole human spirit” (St. Gregory of Nazianzus). Prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the Trinity.

Fear of Deception

The biggest stumbling block to Life in Christ is fear. Many Catholics are leery of any inner, spiritual revelations from their Heavenly Father because they are afraid of being deceived. However, fear of the devil cannot be stronger than our trust in God’s ability to keep us safe or we will miss out on the fullness of life in Christ which is available to us.

An attitude of fear which shuts out God completely basically means we trust more in the power of the devil, a mere angel, to deceive us than in the power of the Lord of Heaven and Earth to guide and protect us. Of course, we need to exercise prudence and discernment concerning our inner journey towards the Heart of our Beloved but our God is not a harsh dictator. God is a loving Father who forgives and picks us up when we fall.

Decades ago, as a young Christian, I thought I was an authentic follower of Christ but in reality, I lived in fear, in a kind of prison or solitary confinement which shut out the Love of God. This attitude was challenged when I attended a retreat in university given by a Madonna House priest, Archbishop Raya, the Archbishop of Lebanon. He shattered my picture of God with the following metaphor:

Don’t be afraid of making mistakes because Jesus will wash you clean and then tell you to go play again. He does not say, “Stand in the corner and don’t you dare get dirty again.” Our Father in Heaven acts just like a mother, who bathes her dirty child, only to let him go outside and play again, even though she knows he will probably get dirty all over again.

When we let go of fear and trust in the power of God to nurture us as His little children, we are protected. Indeed, the Church protects us with the gifts of confession and spiritual direction and encourages us to learn as we study Scripture, the lives of the saints, our mystical traditions, and the teachings of the Church. All these tools act as signposts and safeguard against deception. Of course, Christ Himself promised the most powerful tool for discernment would be the presence of the Holy Spirit within all His baptized followers.

The Church teaches that all Catholics have received the Holy Spirit who will lead them into all truth and alert them to the lies of the devil. So why are Catholics so worried about deception by the evil one?

The Holy Spirit Will Guide You Into All Truth

The Holy Spirit is our inner Companion who leads us; we do not need to live in fear of spiritual revelations. Many of God the Father’s children are so afraid that the devil will lead them astray, they do not even listen to His interior whispers of love. Surely we trust more in God than the devil, a mere fallen angel?

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his

own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” [John 16:13](#)

Catholics must start giving the Holy Spirit permission to do His job. I cannot help feeling sorry for our Lord while at the same time I refuse to let go of control and trust fully in Him. What a conundrum. Let’s honestly choose to humbly trust in God to lead and teach us as His children.

The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which help make a man open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David (cf. [Isaiah 11:1-2](#)).

They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.

Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. ([Psalm 143:10](#))

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God ... If children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. ([Romans 8:14, 17](#))

Often Christians must simply acknowledge that we cannot intellectually grasp all heavenly mysteries. We choose to continue our walk in, with, and through the Holy Spirit, trusting in God without fear of making a mistake because we will make mistakes. Yet, we cannot allow fear of the devil and deception to be stronger than our trust in God’s Mercy and Grace. Fear freezes us, often preventing the inner spiritual journey that leads to fullness of life in Christ. Trust me, I know what fear can do to a person. Now I realize that God the Father will bring me into the light; He will lead me into all truth despite my weaknesses and sins.

Let’s trust more in God’s power to guide us than in the devil’s power to deceive.

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