

Year of Faith

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St Ethelbert's Parish, Deane, Bolton



Is there only one, true Faith?

Some people say that all religions are basically the same. On the other hand, people say that the Catholic church is the only true church. Which is it? This question suggests a couple of attitudes we should avoid. First, it is incorrect to say that all religions are the same, teaching only a common version of "do-goodism." Second, it is wrong to insinuate that all religious truth belongs to Catholics or, for that matter, any Christian denomination. A famous story from India illustrates the latter point; Three blind persons are in a dark room groping an elephant. One describes the trunk, another the tail, and a third the feet. All are describing the same reality, but none has a grasp of the entire truth. Religions are like this. Each has a grasp of part of the religious truth, but none can claim to know everything. Christians would agree with this illustration up to a point. From a Christian perspective, Jesus—the Light of the World—enters the dark room and brings light as well as offering the gift of sight to those who believe in him. This cure is the gift of faith which allows the new Christian to see Christ Jesus as "the Way, the Truth, and the Light" (Jn 14:6). Jesus' presence and the gift of faith enable Christians to comprehend the fullest religious truth that God has revealed to humankind. If you come to believe that Jesus Christ is God's Ultimate Revealer who saves us, then you must conclude that Christianity is the true religion. Logically, you'd want to join a Christian church. But which Christian church? The Second Vatican Council taught that the church Christ intended to found subsists in the Roman Catholic church. This means that the Catholic church most fully contains and presents Jesus' message. The traditional four marks of the church help reveal this fullness. Briefly, they show that the church is:

- ✓ **ONE.** In the Catholic church there is a unity of belief, moral teaching, and liturgical celebration.
- ✓ **HOLY.** The Catholic church celebrates all seven sacraments especially the eucharist. It also holds up the Bible, the example of countless saints, many rich prayer styles, and the like, to help a church of sinners strive for holiness.
- ✓ **CATHOLIC.** The word catholic means "universal." The Catholic church is for all people, in all places, at all times. It is not an exclusive club or limited to certain races, sexes, national or ethnic groups. It is open to everything Jesus taught, and it contains the fullness of a faith relationship to him.
- ✓ **APOSTOLIC.** Jesus founded the church on the apostles, who in turn appointed successors. The teaching office of the pope and bishops can be traced back to the apostles. The Catholic church professes the same basic Christian creed first taught by the apostles.

The Catholic church has the fullness of Christ's truth. However, the church also teaches that other Christian churches have varying degrees of sanctification and truth. The Holy Spirit sheds his light and love on other Christian denominations, religions, and indeed all people.

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Pray for the Dead

The feast day of “All Souls” sets the tone for the rest of November. During this month, we are asked to pray for the dead. This is not only a wonderful act of love and loyalty to our loved ones, recommended in the Bible, but it is also good for us -- this state gives us strength, and most of all, the gift of inner peace.



Prayer of Trust

We seem to give them back to you, dear Lord. You gave them to us. But just as you did not lose them in giving, neither do we lose them in returning them to you. You do not give things in the way the world gives. What you give, you do not take away. You have taught us that what is yours is ours also, if we are yours. Life is eternal, Lord, and love is immortal, and death is only a horizon, and a horizon is nothing but the limits of our sight. Lift us up, strong Son of God, that we might see further. Cleanse our eyes, that we may see more clearly. Draw us closer to you, O Lord, that we may find ourselves closer to our loved ones who are with you. And while you prepare a place for them, prepare us also for that heavenly place, where you are, and where our loved ones are, and where we hope to be forever. Amen.

When we pray for the faithful departed we have five different purposes in mind:

➤ Firstly, we want to praise God and thank God for the life of someone who has had a loving impact on us -- the lives of our parents, grandparents, spouses and friends where all gifts to us from God.

➤ Secondly, we remember that eternal life is a completely unmerited gift to us from God, achieved only by the dying and rising of Jesus. However, we can pray that God’s mercy will come upon our deceased loved ones. We have, as Catholics, a long tradition of praying for the souls in Purgatory, confident that God’s powerful love and mercy does not end at death.

➤ Thirdly, our prayer today and during the months of November for the dead is a tangible way of showing our

membership in the Communion of Saints. In other words, the faithful departed are not dead but they live in God, and we trust and hope that they now live with God

in all eternity. They are still part of the spiritual family we called the Church. Where they have gone, we hope one day to be, and the big part of heaven’s joy will be our reunion with them.

➤ Fourthly, today, in a special way, we pray for all those who mourn. That’s why we go to funerals, to be in a prayerful

solidarity with our friends who are grieving. We want to support them, and the best way to do that is by praying with and for them.

➤ And finally, we pray for ourselves. The death of someone we love is always a “wake-up call”. It reminds us of our own human fragility, our own mortality. It remains us that life is a journey homewards to the Father -- that our final goal is heaven.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord! And let perpetual light shine upon them. May the rest in peace. Amen.