



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

ARE CATHOLICS CHRISTIANS?

Behold The Truth

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith
beholdthetruth.com



Are Catholics Christians?

- ❖ Believers in various different Christian denominations sometimes deny that Catholics are Christians.
- ❖ This thinking flows from misunderstandings surrounding certain Catholic doctrines—such as the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, the authority of the Pope, and Mary’s special role—which they believe are mere human traditions not found in the Bible.



Are Catholics Christians?

- ❖ These teachings had been universally accepted by Christians as divinely revealed truth prior to Martin Luther's break from the Catholic Church in 1517.
- ❖ After Luther's break, those Catholic teachings which he and his followers misunderstood or with which they disagreed were modified or discarded.



Are Catholics Christians?

- ❖ The question of whether or not Catholics are Christians is ironic given that Catholics are in fact *the original Christians*.
- ❖ Of all the different Christian groups throughout the world today, the Catholic Church alone is able to trace her history and teachings back through time to the Apostles and to Jesus Christ in the first century A.D.



Are Catholics Christians?

- ❖ In contrast, there are tens of thousands of distinct non-Catholic Christian sects or denominations in existence worldwide. (In 2001, the *World Christian Encyclopedia* identified over 33,000.)
- ❖ This widespread division is the fruit of Luther's split from the Church in 1517.
- ❖ The oldest non-Catholic Christian groups today can only trace their history back to the time of Luther; and most of the others to a considerably later point.



One True Church

- ❖ Jesus promised to build *one Church*, not many different churches.
- ❖ And He promised the Church He would build would never fall.
- ❖ To the Apostle Peter He declared: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
Matthew 16:18



One True Church

- ❖ Jesus is like the wise builder in His parable, who built His house on rock instead of sand, so that when the storms came the house was not ruined, but endured.
Cf. Matthew 7:24-27
- ❖ Christ's one true Church, founded on Saint Peter, has endured the storms of time, the assaults from within and from without, and still stands today.



One True Church

- ❖ If indeed the Catholic Church is Christ's one true Church, then we should expect to find a continuity of her teachings, extending from today back through the centuries to the Apostles.
- ❖ Let us test this hypothesis using some of the controversial doctrines that set Catholicism apart from the multitude of denominations: the Eucharist, the Pope, and Mary.



The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ At the Last Supper, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
Luke 22:19
- ❖ And blessing the cup in the same way, He said, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”
Luke 22:20
- ❖ As Catholics, we believe Jesus meant what He said and that He actually changed the bread and wine into His Body and Blood.



The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ Catholics believe the Holy Eucharist is not just a *symbol* of Christ's Body and Blood, but that It truly *is* His Body and Blood.
- ❖ We believe that while It still looks and tastes like bread and wine Its *substance* has been transformed, so that Christ is really present to us under the *appearance* of bread and wine.



The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ This corresponds to what the Apostle Paul taught about the Eucharist in the Bible.
- ❖ “The cup of blessing which we bless,” he said, “is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ... Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:27-28



The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ In His famous Bread of Life Sermon in the sixth chapter of John's *Gospel*, Jesus declares: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” John 6:53-56




The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ How do we know the way we are interpreting the Bible's teaching on the Eucharist in the right way? For other Christian groups interpret it very differently.
- ❖ We can check our interpretation against that of the early Christians, as recorded in the ancient historical sources known as the writings of the Early Church Fathers.

The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ These historical writings come from Christian leaders who learned the faith either from the Apostles directly or from those who knew them.
- ❖ This makes the writings of the Church Fathers an invaluable resource for believers today.
- ❖ For they give us insights into how Christians living in the Apostolic era interpreted the Bible; allowing us to compare what we believe to what they believed.

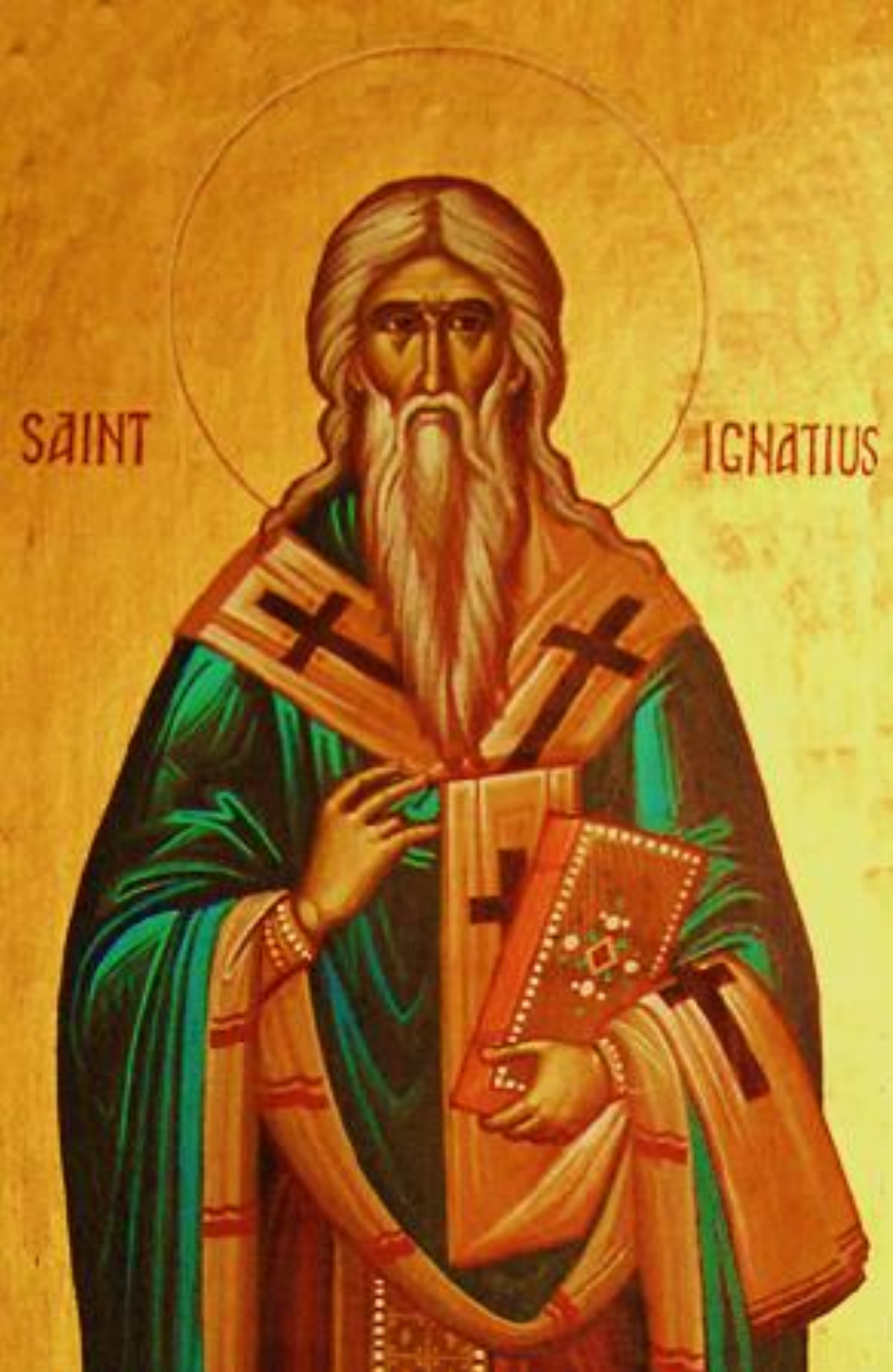


Chi Rho (early Christian symbol consisting of first two letters of Christ in Greek), Catacomb of Saint Callixtus in Rome, circa 200 A.D.



The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ Saint Ignatius of Antioch, for example, was an early bishop and a disciple of the Apostle John (the author of *John* chapter 6)!
- ❖ In about 107 A.D., Ignatius was arrested by the Roman soldiers and brought to Rome to be thrown to the wild beasts in the Coliseum.
- ❖ On the journey from Antioch to Rome, he wrote seven letters to Churches in cities he passed along the way; and these letters have been handed down to us.



The Holy Eucharist

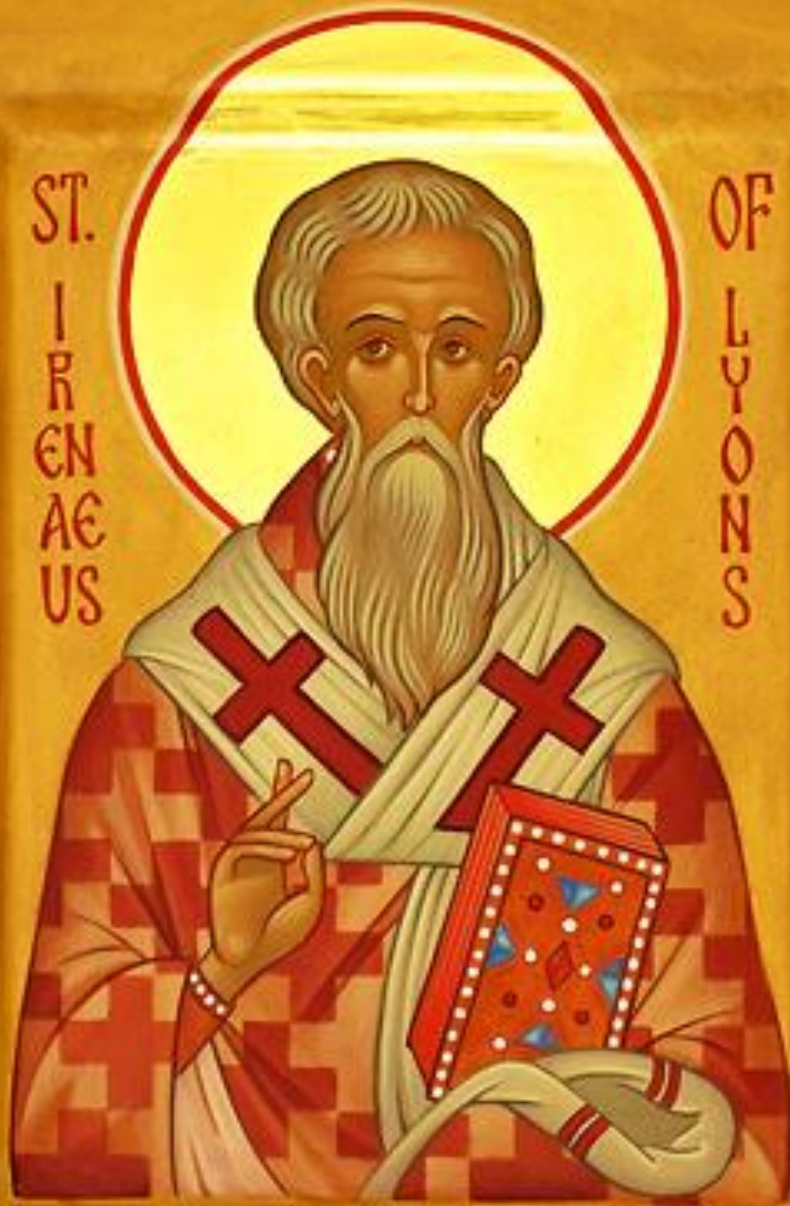
- ❖ Of the Eucharist, this disciple of John warned believers to avoid the Gnostic Docetists, for they denied Christ had truly come in the flesh.
- ❖ “They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer,” said Ignatius, “because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, Flesh which suffered for our sins and which the Father, in His goodness, raised up again.” *Letter to the Smyrnaeans 7:1*



The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ Ignatius of Antioch also happens to be the first person on record to call Christ's Church the Catholic Church.
- ❖ “Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop,” he went on to say, “Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”

Letter to the Smyrnaeans 8:1-2



The Holy Eucharist

- ❖ Another prominent Church Father is Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, who was also an early bishop and martyr, and the student of Saint Polycarp, another of John's disciples.
- ❖ In about 185 A.D, Irenaeus wrote, "If the Lord were from other than the Father, how could He rightly take bread, which is of the same creation as our own, and confess it to be His Body, and affirm that the mixture in the cup is His Blood?" *Against Heresies* 4:33:2



The Pope

- ❖ Another teaching which sets Catholics apart from other Christians is our belief that the Pope, as the successor of Saint Peter and the Bishop of Rome, bears special teaching authority in the Church.
- ❖ We base this belief on Jesus' promise to build His Church on Peter, and to give him "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," saying, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:19



Peter's Tomb (ca. 67 A.D.), rediscovered in 1941 beneath the main altar at the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome. Latin inscriptions dating from the 3rd century include Christian symbols, prayer petitions, and Peter's name repeated about 20 times.

The Pope

- ❖ Writing to the Church of Rome in 107, Ignatius acknowledged her preeminent teaching authority, calling her “the Church which holds the presidency in the place of the country of the Romans.”
Letter to the Romans, Address
- ❖ And he went on to say, “You have envied no one, but others you have taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instructions may remain in force.” Ibid. 3:1

The Pope

- ❖ In 185, Irenaeus called the Church of Rome “the greatest and most ancient Church known to all.”
Against Heresies 3:3:2
- ❖ “With this Church,” he went on to say, “because of its superior origin, all Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition.” Ibid.
- ❖ He went on to list the Bishops of Rome by name down to his time, commenting, “In this order, and by the teaching of the Apostles handed down in the Church, the preaching of the truth has come down to us.”
Ibid. 3:3:3



Bones believed by researchers to be those of Saint Peter.



Mary

- ❖ The Church's teachings on Mary are among her most controversial teachings.
- ❖ In fact, some non-Catholic Christians mistakenly believe we worship Mary.
- ❖ In truth, Catholics do not worship her—we *worship God alone!*
- ❖ We *venerate* or *honor* Mary because of her special role in salvation history.



Mary

- ❖ The Church has always regarded Mary as the New Eve, helpmate of Christ, the New Adam. Cf. Rom. 5:14-15
- ❖ Just as the first Eve welcomed sin and death into the world through her disobedience to God; Mary the New Eve welcomed Our Savior into the world through her “Yes” to God at the Annunciation. “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.” Luke 1:38



Mary

- ❖ Revealing Mary's close cooperation with Christ in His work of Redemption, Ignatius of Antioch wrote, "The virginity of Mary, her giving birth, and also the death of the Lord, were hidden from the prince of this world:—three mysteries loudly proclaimed, but wrought in the silence of God."

Letter to the Ephesians 19:1

*Madonna and Child,
Catacomb of Saint Priscilla in Rome,
circa 150 A.D.*

Earliest extant image of the Virgin Mary.

Mary

- ❖ Irenaeus wrote, “Mary alone co-operat[ed] with the pre-arranged plan. . . . [S]o also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race. . . . And thus also it was that the knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the Virgin Mary set free through faith.” *Against Heresies* 3:21:7; 3:22:4



Chaire, Maria (“Hail, Mary,” in Greek),
Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth,
circa 250 A.D.

Earliest extant use of the prayer.



Catholic & Christian

- ❖ As the writings of the Early Church Fathers prove, the Eucharist, the Pope, and Mary are not strange teachings, but part of the original Christian message.
- ❖ In upholding these divine truths, then, the Catholic Church is not denying its Christian identity, but affirming it.



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

Produced by

Behold The Truth

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith

visit us at

beholdthetruth.com