

Connecting with Christ and the Church

When talking about faith with my family and friends, they don't always understand why I'm Catholic. They ask things like: *how do you follow all those strict rules? Aren't you excluded, being a woman? Doesn't church seem pointless, or superfluous?*

In entertaining their questions, I see that my loved ones just want one thing for me and themselves: connection. When they glance at the Catholic Church, they see stiff, systematic rules, self-glorifying hierarchy, and impersonal ceremony. It isn't their fault; most people never have the privilege of really *seeing* the Church hidden beneath article headlines, building exteriors, and the occasional celebrity conversion. When people don't dig deeper into the rich deposit of our faith, all they see is a showy display of "righteousness" that's too inhuman—too emotionless and too detached from real life suffering and experience—to really resonate. It repels people, so they turn away. I don't blame them.

But I can't leave them. The Catholic Church that *I've* seen, and experienced, and intimately known, is all about connection. It's about Christ coming down to earth to *connect* the human and the divine. It's about *connecting* life and death, that we may hope in Resurrection after our every Passion—after every loss, injury, and suffering. It's about sinners sitting among the saints, *connecting* over their shared human dignity. It's about *connecting* with God, who is love—and love is the greatest sign of that connection which we all desire. And out of that love, I cannot watch as my friends and family turn to leave the Church they haven't even seen yet.

I have to show the Church to them, because otherwise all they will see of it is the facade of our own faults—our own human misrepresentations of the mystical love that waits to embrace them. I have to pull back the curtain of rite and ritual so that they can see the love working behind it. You don't get someone to come back to the sacraments—the Mass,

especially— by bogging them down with procedure. You get them to come back by showing them the source from which all that order flows.

That source, of course, is Christ. Any Mass without Christ at its center is nothing but ceremony; but as soon as we place Christ at the heart of the Mass, it becomes a celebration. Our shuffling into church becomes a joyful arrival into the home of Christ, who welcomes and embraces us. Mumbled hymns become gathering songs between intimate friends. Readings and prayer become dinner table conversations with our closest companion. The Eucharist taken solemnly in hand becomes an intimate encounter that fills the heart with infinite value. Once we make that *connection* with Christ in the Mass, nothing can turn us away from the Church. Nothing can disguise the overwhelming love which resonates with every real life suffering and experience. Christ is so intimately bound to the Church that without first knowing him, we cannot truly know Catholicism.

Thus, in every interaction I seek to give my friends and family the same love that Christ has given me in the Mass. With every kind word, personal communion, and selfless service, I can foster that *connection* which draws people past the surface of the Church and into its deepest core. If I show my loved ones the source, then eventually, they will come back to the summit.