

Do you believe everything that the Catholic Church teaches?

Of course I do. I wouldn't be Catholic if I didn't! I mean that seriously; if I didn't believe in the valid teaching authority of the Catholic Church, then I would have to go somewhere else. That just seems to make sense to me. No one "has to be" Catholic. It is a decision. And that decision is based off of the intellectual conclusion that it is true.

In fact, I really like something C.S. Lewis wrote in his great book, *Mere Christianity*, "The only reason to believe something is because it is true". That is just common sense. If Catholicism isn't true, then I should not believe it, even if it makes me good or even if it makes me happy. We must be willing to be honest.

Maybe we can take as our starting point the Profession of Faith that every Christian must make before they are received into the Catholic Church. In the midst of the Easter Vigil, they rise and proclaim these words: "I believe and profess all that the Catholic Church teaches, believes, and proclaims to be revealed by God."

That is a big statement. But then again, it only makes sense that a person would say this before they enter into full communion with the Church. If they do not believe everything, then they would be picking and choosing what suited them. Not only would this lead to a certain "theological schizophrenia", but it also goes directly against the biblical images of the Church.

Saint Paul describes the Church as both the "household of God" (or "family of God") and the "Body of Christ". I believe that both of these images make it clear why we cannot accept the Church in parts. Belonging to a family means that I live according to the rules of the family. How many of us have heard the words, "As long as you're living under this roof..."? Well, if we are Catholic, then we are living under the patronage of the Church that Christ founded. If we are going to be clothed and fed by our Mother the Church, then we honor the curfew she sets. (Is that image too hokey? I think that it works).

In fact, the Catechism talks about the Church in just the same way. It is not enough to have God as our Father; we must also have the Church as our Mother. It states, "Salvation comes from God alone; but because we receive the life of faith through the Church, she is our mother: 'We believe the Church as the mother of our new birth, and not in the Church as if she were the author of our salvation.' Because she is our mother, she is also our teacher in the faith" (CCC 169).

Even more, if the Church is the Body of Christ, and I only accept parts of the Body, what am I doing? I am amputating the Body. I am cutting up and dividing what is meant to be a coherent and effective whole. What do I mean "coherent" and "effective"?

The Church only makes sense as a whole. If the Church is ever only “partly right”, then she cannot be trusted. The Church is only “effective” when those within the Church are united. How awful is it to go to Mass and know that you are not united in core beliefs? There are enough things that divide us, those things are only compounded when we don’t actually share the same faith. If you want to find a Church that makes zero impact on the world, just find a Church that is divided on essential doctrines. Back in the year 180, St. Irenaeus wrote these words, "Indeed, the Church, though scattered throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, having received the faith from the apostles and their disciples. . . guards [this preaching and faith] with care, as dwelling in but a single house, and similarly believes as if having but one soul and a single heart, and preaches, teaches and hands on this faith with a unanimous voice, as if possessing only one mouth" (CCC 173).

Faith is a key factor of course. And while I do not want to dismiss the great gift and virtue of faith, we must acknowledge that, as Catholics, we are thinkers. There is no room for “blind faith” in the Catholic Church; we must seek to understand what we believe. This means asking questions. It means seeking answers. But it also means seeking answers with a spirit of humility and courage.

Because here’s the thing. I find that the teachings people question the most are not always the most difficult to intellectually understand (try and understand the Mystery of the Trinity, sheesh!), but rather the teachings that are most difficult to live. This leads me to ask if this lack of “belief” is more a lack of courage and humility. Now, certainly there are many people who struggle to intellectually understand and submit in faith to key doctrines like the Incarnation or the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and their honest questions need to be met with respect and a high degree of intellectual maturity. But maybe what we need more of us the humility to acknowledge that a teaching is true even when I have failed to live up to it. Maybe I need more courage to ask God’s mercy and forgiveness and begin again.