



THE AQUINAS INSTITUTE

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY'S CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY

# RCIA

Christian Formation Process

**The Aquinas Institute's Guide to Understanding Catholic Christianity**

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# RCIA

Christian Formation Process

## The RCIA Journey

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults or RCIA is an exploration of the Catholic faith. For some the purpose of this journey is to simply learn more about the faith itself. For others, it is a process of preparing to become Catholic. For both it is an introduction into not only the fundamental beliefs of the faith and its moral structures, but also an invitation to put those principles into practice in daily life.

Whether you have begun reading this handbook out of curiosity or serious intent, it is structured in such a way as to provide basic information about the faith, give suggestions for further reading by topic, supply weekly exercises to allow contemplation on the principles covered, and pair each topic with the daily faith practices which utilize them. Space is also provided for journaling, jotting down questions that arise during the journey, and helpful prayers and reflections appropriate for the different feasts and seasons in the church calendar.

The topics are laid out in a weekly structure designed to cover a single academic year if begun from September. Each week begins with a short reflection and prayer intentions for the week. This is followed by 5 separate activities. Three sets of readings around a theological concept, one journaling assignment for personal reflection, and one activity designed to introduce you to some practice or tradition in the daily lives of the faithful.

The topics build on one another from week to week in order to build the faith up from first principles, so that it is easy to understand how different aspects of the faith connect to each other and build to a well reasoned and consistent world view. Hopefully, this will allow each inquirer to have a spiritual, intellectual, and emotional experience with the faith on their journey.

Our journey will take place in three phases:

1. Inquiry: The Creed, the fundamentals of our faith
2. Preparation: Catholic morality: the effects of our faith
3. Mystagogy: Faith in practice: the practical steps to a life long faith

## The Stages of the RCIA Journey

### First Step: Period of Inquiry

This is a time for asking questions. Many of you have already started asking question about Catholicism or you would not be reading this guide. Keep in mind there is no rush to ending this period of inquiry. Some people come to RCIA already to convert while others may take years

making the decision. Either way we are happy to have you.

### **Second Step: Rite of Acceptance into The Order of Catechumens and the Period of the Catechumenate**

Some of the inquiries become firm in their desire for initiation and decide that they would like to begin more formal study of the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. They are admitted into the next step through a special ceremony called the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. In this ritual the Church symbolically claims these men and women for Christ by signing them with the cross.

This is the first time that the inquirers publicly declare their faith before the community.

Because no one likes to do something like that on his/her own, each inquirer is accompanied by a sponsor. Sponsors may be chosen by the individual or provided by the community. Sponsors provide support and companionship for the rest of the RCIA process.

After this rite, the inquirers are called catechumens. This name indicates that they are learning the teachings of the Church and beginning to accept Catholic tradition and practices.

Even though they are not yet permitted to receive the sacraments, the catechumens do enjoy other important rights. They have a right to assistance as they grow in faith by learning about the teachings of the Church and participating in works of service in the community. They also have a right to be married in the Church and to receive Christian burial.

### **Third Step: Rite of Election and the Period of Purification and Enlightenment**

The period of the catechumenate ends when the catechumens discern, with the help of their sponsors and the RCIA team, that God is calling them to receive the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist) at the next Easter Vigil. Before they can be initiated, they must be officially called to the sacraments by the bishop or someone designated by him. This Rite of Election is celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent in the Trenton cathedral.

The Rite of Election marks the end of formal study of the teachings and practices of the Church.

The catechumens are now called the elect. The weeks of Lent are a time of intense prayer as the elect prepare themselves to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord at Easter and to receive the sacraments of initiation.

On the Sundays of Lent, the elect are prayed for in a special way to help them prepare more fully for the sacraments. The sponsors continue to accompany the elect in church and support them in their Lenten preparations.

### **Fourth Step: Initiation and Mystagogia**

On Holy Saturday, the community assembles for the Easter Vigil. The Church has always recognized that in baptism, we die to sin in Christ's death so that we may rise to new life with him. The Easter Vigil is the primary celebration of the Lord's Resurrection and is, therefore, the most appropriate occasion for the elect to celebrate their Baptism, confirmation and first Eucharist.

For the newly initiated, now called neophytes, the time between Easter and Pentecost is a special opportunity to reflect on the commitment which they have made to the Lord, to the Church and to the local Catholic community. This time of unfolding the meaning of the initiation sacraments is called mystagogia. The Sunday scripture readings, which explain the meaning of the resurrection and of baptism, have special meaning for these new Catholics.

The journey of faith lasts a lifetime. The weeks after Easter are a time for new Catholics to seek out their place in the community. Other community members can reach out to welcome them, helping them to get involved and feel at home.

## **RCIA 2017-2018**

### **Part 1 The Creed**

Sept 24<sup>th</sup> Inquiry

Oct 1<sup>st</sup> The Nature of Faith

Oct 8<sup>th</sup> God the Father and the Creator

Oct 15<sup>th</sup> Christ and the Incarnation

Oct 22<sup>nd</sup> The Holy Spirit

Nov 12<sup>th</sup> Personal Redemption

Nov 19<sup>th</sup> Mary Mother of God

Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> Catholics and the Church

**Dec 3<sup>rd</sup> 1st Sunday of Advent - The Rite of Welcome**

### **Part 2 Sacraments and Morality**

**Dec 8<sup>th</sup> The Feast of the Immaculate Conception - Holy Day of Obligation**

Dec 10<sup>th</sup> Sin and Confession

**Dec 25<sup>th</sup> The Nativity of the Lord - Holy Day of Obligation**

Jan 7<sup>th</sup> Baptism

Jan 14<sup>th</sup> Confirmation and the Eucharist

Feb 4<sup>th</sup> Anointing of the Sick

Feb 11<sup>th</sup> Marriage

**Feb 14<sup>th</sup> Ash Wednesday**

**Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 1st Sunday of Lent - The Rite of Election**

Feb 18<sup>th</sup> The Moral Virtues

Feb 25<sup>th</sup> The Ten Commandments 1-5

March 4<sup>th</sup> The Ten Commandments 7-10

**March 4<sup>th</sup> The Third Sunday of Lent - The 1st Scrutiny**

March 11<sup>th</sup> Heaven, Hell, & Purgatory

**March 11<sup>th</sup> The Fourth Sunday of Lent - The 2nd Scrutiny**

April 1<sup>st</sup> Introduction to Prayer

April 9<sup>th</sup> Praying the Scriptures

**April 15<sup>th</sup> Easter Sunday - The Rite of Initiation**

**Part 3 Practical Faith**

April 22<sup>nd</sup> Happiness and Freedom

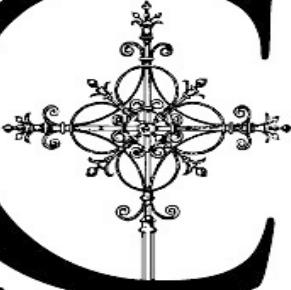
April 29<sup>th</sup> Devotional Practices

May 10<sup>th</sup> Spiritual Direction

**May 10<sup>th</sup> The Ascension of the Lord - Holy Day Obligation**

May 13<sup>th</sup> Concluding Dinner Is the Church Safe for the Modern World?

# RCIA



## Christian Formation Process

### **Week 1:**

#### **The Period of Inquiry**

Before we begin our journey together, let us first take some time to build a list of questions you want answered.

#### **Section 1: A reflection on the virtues of curiosity**

#### **Section 2: Weekly prayer intentions**

#### **Section 3: Common Questions about Catholicism**

#### **Section 4: Resources for finding answers**

#### **Section 5: The Question Log**

#### **Section 6: Journal: The Seeker**

#### **Section 7: Activity: Lingering Questions**

## The Inherent Good of Asking Questions

For those of you who know me personally, you already have reasons to feel sorry for my mother. For those of you who don't, let's just say I was an inquisitive child who would never let a question go until satisfying explanations were provided, by any means necessary. Sometimes this persistence got me into trouble, sometimes a lot of trouble. It is fair to say I never learned my lesson, as I am still asking hard questions and bearing the consequences. One particular unsettled question actually steered my life in a whole new direction.

I could not have been more than seven when I began to dog my Sunday School teacher with all the persistence of the Spanish Inquisition. The subject, Noah's Ark, should be safe for a 1st grade Sunday morning lesson, but up my hand went, and life was never the same. "Noah really put all the animals on the ark? Even the Dinosaurs?" I followed her reply: "no, there were no dinosaurs on the ark," with a whole new barrage of questions. Why not? What happened to them? Did they not fit? Would Noah let them drown? Is that why they all went extinct? I was relentless. Eventually, she tried to steer me in another direction. "Well they must have gone extinct before Noah built his ark."

Great, progress. Good thing we had covered God creating the world the week before. Up my hand goes again, "So then Adam named the dinosaurs along with the other animals? Where they the first in line? They aren't mentioned in the list from the story you read us last week. It mentioned the great sea monsters, but not the land-osaurus. Why not? They were just as big, some bigger and scarier, how could God mention the Elasmosaurus and not the T-Rex? At this point, I was shamed into silence for disturbing the class AND she told my mother.

My mother, of course, needed to know why I was rude to the teacher. "I just wanted to know why God killed the Dinosaurs. They must have been there when God made the other animals, but they didn't get to go on the Ark, and not all of them can swim. It doesn't seem fair to leave them behind. It's not their fault they're big." Then I went quiet. My mom, being reprieved of having to answer these questions herself, decided to let the matter go. She's good like that.

But this question plagued me without answer for a great while. Eventually, I became a scientist and thought that would supply all the answers, but what I really learned was how to ask and answer better questions. In biology, we learn that while many dinosaurs went extinct, some evolved into present day birds. There were birds on the Ark; in fact, without the dove, Noah would never have gotten off. So that would have satisfied 7-year-old me.

But older me was only beginning to ask questions. With the freedom that comes with college and Boston being somewhat bereft of Southern Baptist churches, I was left largely to my own religious devices. My home church dutifully mailed me a tape of Sunday's sermon, but a cold recording is no replacement for a real church community.

So I ventured out to find a new church home. I went anywhere friends invited me, regardless of denomination. Suddenly I was aware of how little I knew about the wider Christian community.



There were liturgical seasons, prescribed readings, and kneeling. I was a stranger in a strange land I thought I had called home all my life.

Over my four years of college, I learned about many religions through attending services, reading, and most importantly asking questions. By the end of college, I was asked to participate in a senior privilege at the campus chapel's Protestant service. "This I believe" is a series of reflections given by graduating seniors about their faith journey during college given on the last Sunday of the school year. I was terrified of this. What did I actually believe?

In the end, honesty is always the best policy. So I told the truth. "This is what I can say for sure: there is a God and it is a Christian God. Otherwise, I have no certain answers or even a denomination to call myself. I am Eustace at the beginning of the Silver Chair, by C.S. Lewis. I am standing at the edge of a cliff and a lion is asking me to jump. Faith compels me forward and I have landed on a soft cloud carrying me gently to the ground, but where the journey ends I cannot say. I can only say that I am thankful for my time here. This community has shown me great kindness, answering my barrage of questions with wisdom and love. It is because of you that I have learned it is ok to leap."

Not long after this speech, I found Crossing the Threshold of Hope by Pope John Paul II lying on a table in a bookstore. It was a series of questions JP II answered for an atheist journalist and it rang true as a perspective on faith that brought all of the pieces together, but still seemed so unknown. I was raised to believe that Catholics aren't really Christians. So I tried to put it out of my mind. Though this reminded me that I wasn't sure how my current Methodist denomination would answer this journalist's questions either, so I asked the assistant pastor, whom I was friends with. As lovingly as she answered my questions, I still found I believed JP II had the better answer. Then, I tired ignoring it. That lasted only awhile. A few years later, a Catholic friend invited me to an Ash Wednesday mass. I had missed my own church's service so I went along. I could see so much of the things Pope John Paul II had discussed in his book going on around me. Thus, I knew when I left that my cloud had safely landed and I had found my home.

The RCIA process I began the following Fall ultimately meant I never went another Easter without communion and I was beginning my new Catholic journey.

We all come to RCIA at different stages of life with different questions, different baggage, but the same desire. We are all here seeking truth. So ask your questions. Express your doubts. Our community will answer with wisdom and love.

Take the leap. I cannot promise you where you will land, but it will be worth the journey.

**Week 1 Prayer Intentions**

**The Sign of the Cross**

Start by touching your right hand to your forehead, then your stomach, followed by your left and right shoulders while saying "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen"

**My longing for truth**

For the longing for truth that you have planted deep within me.  
It is not going to be fobbed off with empty promises,  
Simplistic solutions, or hollow phrases.

I ask you, my Father, to help me look at the truth of my own life.,  
At all that is genuine and all that is false, at all that is true and al the lies,  
At all the fullness and all the emptiness.

I trust in you, my Father, to come into my life  
And brighten my darkness with your light,  
And be for me the Truth that will fill all my longing.  
Amen.

**Specific intentions:**

Lord, help me to understand what motivates me to explore Catholicism.  
Lord, let me ask my questions about honestly and directly.  
Lord, give me the courage to accept the answers that I receive with an open mind.

Pause for some silence

**Personal intentions:**

Please add your own intentions here. You may write them below if you like:

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**Our Father:**

Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be that name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**Glory Be:**

Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end, Amen.

## **Top 10 Most Common Questions about Catholicism\***

### **10. Are your beliefs found in the Bible?**

All Catholic beliefs can be found in the Bible in some form, whether plainly or by an indirect indication. It is not necessary for everything to be absolutely clear in Scripture alone, because that is not a teaching of Scripture itself. Scripture also points to an authoritative Church and Tradition, as St. Paul says in his Second Letter to the Thessalonians: "Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess 2:15 - see also 1 Cor 11:2, 2 Thess 3:6; 2 Tim (1:13-14; 2:2)). When the first Christians had a significant disagreement, they didn't simply open their Bibles (which didn't even exist at that point) to decide who was right; they held a council, which made binding decrees (Acts 15:1-29). The very books of the Bible had to be determined by the Church and that didn't happen until the late fourth century. Therefore, Sacred Tradition and authority were necessary for us to even have a Bible today.

### **9. Why do you obey the Pope?**

Catholics believe that Jesus commissioned St. Peter as the first leader of the Church. Matthew's Gospel has the most direct biblical indication of the papacy: "And I tell you, you are Peter (meaning literally "Rock") and on this rock I will build my church ... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 16:18-19). Based on this statement of Jesus himself, Peter is clearly portrayed in the New Testament as the leader of the disciples. A pope can make infallible, binding pronouncements under certain conditions. Infallibility doesn't mean that absolutely everything a pope says is free from error. All Christians believe that God protected Holy Scripture from error by means of inspiration, even though sinful, fallible men wrote it. We Catholics also believe that God the Holy Spirit protects His Church and its head from error (Jn 14:16) by means of infallibility, even though sinful, imperfect men are involved in it.

### **8. Why do you call your priest "Father"?**

"And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (Mt 23:9). In this passage, Jesus is teaching that God the Father alone is ultimately the source of all authority. But He is not speaking absolutely, because if so, that would eliminate even biological fathers, the title "Church Fathers", the founding fathers of a country or organization and so on. Jesus himself uses the term "father" in Matthew (15:4-5; 19:5, 19, 29; 21:31), John (8:56) and several other places. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Jesus actually presents Lazarus as using the address "Father Abraham" twice (Lk 16:24, 30 - see also Acts 7:2; Rom 4:12; Jas 2:21). St. Paul also uses the term when he writes, "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel (1 Cor 4:15 - see also 1 Cor 4:14-16) and refers to "our forefather Isaac" (Rom 9:10).

### **7. Why do you pray for the dead?**

The Bible clearly teaches the rightness of prayers for the dead in 2 Maccabees (12:40, 42, 44-45): "Then under the tunic of every one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was why these men had fallen ... And they turned to prayer, beseeching that the sin which had been committed

might be wholly blotted out ... For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead ... He made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." St. Paul teaches this in a similar way:

"Otherwise, what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf?" (1 Cor 15:29). This indicates prayer and fasting for the dead. The word baptism often symbolically refers to penances (Mk 10:38-39; Lk 3:16, 12:50). The apostle Paul also appears to be praying for a dead person, Onesiphorus, in 2 Timothy (1:16-18).

#### **6. Why do you pray to idols (statues)?**

No Catholic who knows anything about the Catholic faith has ever worshiped a statue (as in pagan idolatry). If we cherish the memory of mere political heroes with statues and that of war heroes with monuments, then there can be no objection to honoring saints and righteous men and women: "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor" (1 Pet 2:17 - see also Rom 12:10; Heb 12:22-23). Statues are simply a visual reminder of great saints and heroes of the faith (Heb 11), who are more alive than we are (2 Cor 3:18), as is evident by their praying: "O Sovereign Lord ... how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" (Rev 6:10 - see also Ps 35:17). The saints in heaven were never intended by God to be cut off from the Body of Christ on earth. They are involved in intercession, just as the saints on earth are and they are described as "so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1).

#### **5. Why do you confess your sins to a priest?**

Jesus Christ gave His disciples - and by extension, priests - the power not only to "loose" sins (that is, forgive in God's name), but also to "bind" (that is, impose penances): "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt 18:18 - see also Mt 16:19). "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:23). The priest serves as the representative of God and of His mercy. Confession gives new courage, confidence and a fresh start. One learns humility by this practice, receives additional grace in order to avoid sin and attains a certainty of forgiveness that is superior to mere feelings. Confession is also indicated in Matthew (3:5-6), Acts (19:18) and 1 John (1:9).

#### **4. Why do you worship Mary?**

Catholics do not worship Mary. We venerate her because she is the mother of God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Veneration is completely different from the adoration of God. It is the honoring of a person, not the worship of Almighty God, our Creator. Catholics believe that Mary is the highest of God's creatures because of her exalted role. But of course, like any other human being, she had to be saved by the mercy of God. She herself said, "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Lk 1:47). We believe that God saved her by taking away all stain of original sin at the moment of her conception (the Immaculate Conception). The very fact that God took on flesh and became man (Jn 1:1, 14) indicates that he wished to involve human beings in His plan of salvation for mankind. Mary was a key person for this purpose, so this is why Catholics honor her so highly.

### **3. Why do you worship wafers?**

A consecrated host or wafer at a Catholic Mass is the true Body and Blood of Christ, not merely bread; so Catholics are worshipping Jesus, not a wafer. In the Gospel of John (6:51-56), Jesus states repeatedly that "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (6:54). He is speaking literally and He is so firm that many followers object and leave Him (6:52, 60, 66). St. Paul agrees with this interpretation and writes that those taking Communion "in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27 - see also 1 Cor 10:16). We don't sin against someone's "body and blood" by destroying a photograph (which is a mere symbol) of the person. Moreover, in the Last Supper passages (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20), nothing suggests a metaphorical or symbolic interpretation. The Last Supper was the Jewish feast of Passover. This involved a sacrificial lamb and Jesus referred to His imminent suffering (Lk 22:15-16, 18, 21-22). John the Baptist had already called Him the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29).

### **2. If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?**

Catholics have an assurance of salvation if they are faithful and keep God's commandments (1 Jn 2:3). If they die in that state, they are assured of heaven. But to enter heaven, one must be perfectly holy, because "nothing unclean shall enter it" (Rev 21:27 - see also Is 4:4; Mal 3:2-4).

The cleansing and purifying of any remaining sin, which makes us fit for God's holy presence, is what Catholics call purgatory. This is clearly indicated in St. Paul's writings: "Each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done ... If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Cor 3:13, 15). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor 5:10).

### **1. Are you saved?**

Catholics can be sure as anyone else that they are in God's good graces. The apostle John states that "you may know that you have eternal life" (1 Jn 5:13 - see also Jn 5:24). But this "assurance" has to be understood in light of John's other teachings in the same book: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 Jn 5:3 - see also 1 Jn 2:3-6). "We know that any one born of God does not sin" (1 Jn 5:18). "He who loves God should love his brother also" (1 Jn 4:21). "He who commits sin is of the devil" (1 Jn 5:18 - see also 1 Cor 6:9).

Likewise, St. Paul does not regard salvation as a one-time event, but as a goal to be sought after, one that can be lost: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12 - see also 1 Cor 9:27, 10:12; Gal 5:1, 4; Phil 3:11-14; 1 Tim 4:1, 5:15).

\*The answers to these common questions were prepared by The Catholic Center at The University of Georgia.

## Resources for Finding Answers

### Resources straight from the source:

The following resources come from the Church itself. All are free to read online.

#### The Catechism of the Catholic Church

[In reading the "Catechism of the Catholic Church "we can perceive the wonderful unity of the mystery of God..." - Pope John Paul II](#)

The Catechism is a complete explanation of all the Catholic Church professes. You will receive a copy as part of the process to read and explore. The online version can also be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/index.cfm>

#### The compendium of the Catechism

Consider this the Spark Notes version. The Catechism can be dense at first and the Q&A format can be helpful in finding answers.

The online version can also be found here:

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium\\_ccc/documents/archive\\_2005\\_compendium-ccc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html)

#### United States Catholic Catechism for Adults

Written under the direction of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Catechism for Adults breaks down the topics from the Catechism into smaller chunks with stories from American Catholic saints and leaders for inspiration. I have borrowed heavily from it for the material you have here, but if you would like to read the rest you can find it on the USCCB's website:

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/us-catholic-catechism-for-adults/index.cfm>

### More "Personable" resources:

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**Week 1 Activity: Ask a Catholic**

This week your task is simple.

An important part of anyone's faith journey is community. The first vital step after knowing what questions you have is to get used to talking to others about faith, especially your own. To help you get this level of comfort, this week, your task is to ask a Catholic some questions about their faith. Some questions are provided, but you can also add some of your own. If you don't know anyone who is Catholic, let us know and we can help you find someone to talk to. Feel free to poll multiple people!

Questions to ask:

1. How long have you been Catholic?
2. How often do you attend mass?
3. What do you like most about being Catholic?
4. Is there anything you dislike?
5. For those who grew up Catholic: Would you still chose Catholicism for yourself, if you hadn't been raised Catholic?
6. For converts: Why did you convert?

Enjoy your conversations.