

# Catholic

## UPDATE

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## THE JOY OF BEING CATHOLIC

As Pope Francis says, “The Church is not a refuge for sad people. The Church is a house of joy.” Let’s look at some reasons for our Catholic joy.

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**W**hen Catholics are baptized, the Christian community welcomes them “with great joy.” Not with an agenda, criticism, challenge, or a 14-page questionnaire. Instead, new members are welcomed with the “great joy” of the shepherd who hoists the lost sheep onto his shoulders (Lk 15:5), focused more on love than sin.

A goal of every religion is joy, often defined as being fully alive, and being united with God and all creation for eternity. Over and over, Jesus speaks of his mission to bring joy and our call to receive it, to be joy-filled.

But Catholicism isn’t a walk in the park. Our high hopes for the kingdom require daily, gritty work on earth to achieve God’s justice. Despite the Church’s human failings, some of the finest people who ever lived have drawn strength and found joy in its treasures. Let’s consider a few of the reasons for our Catholic joy.

## MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE

Catholics believe that, in Jesus, the divine and human met in a perfect marriage. As St. Athanasius said, “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.” It sounds too good to be true. *We*—limited and flawed humans—are made in the very image of the divine; we are God’s children, and God dwells and acts in us.

The life of the Christian is grafted directly onto Jesus’ life. He said, “I no longer call you slaves. . . . I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). We aren’t slaves motivated by fear but rather children secure in a lavish inheritance—a meaningful life now and eternal life after death.

This heritage of joy is for everyone. Saints who had nothing in their bank accounts, no frequent-flier miles, and no reservations at a five-star resort record deep happiness. Who wouldn’t join poet Anne Sexton in her yearning, “I plead with it to be true!”? The U.S. bishops’ Committee on Divine Worship writes, “The people of God . . . form a society whose task it is to praise.” What a job description!

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