

A COMPELLING REASON

The most compelling reason for remaining Catholic, as far as I'm concerned, is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. The great comfort and solace I receive from this sacrament is indescribable. All of us are so blessed and privileged to be able to recognize the Lord in the breaking of the bread.



Countless numbers leave the church because they don't grasp this mystery. They may disagree with the pope or some church policy, but to walk away from the Eucharist is difficult for me to understand. Many others leave because they resent the church for being too doctrinaire and rigid. But is laxity and free thought a better alternative?

Then, of course, there are the many scandals which sicken and confuse the faithful. I've been scandalized myself by priest pedophiles whom I knew personally but never would have suspected in a million years.

Whether the issue is birth control, premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, abortion, the arms race, mandatory celibacy, or the church's preferential option for the poor, people make their decision to leave and go their own way. So be it. All I can say is that without God's grace no one can even come close to living up to the demands of Christ who said, "Be ye perfect!" Very few can really return good for evil, turn the other cheek, and forgive their enemies. Christ asks so much of us.

But should we renounce him because the challenge is too difficult? I don't think so. We are all flawed human beings, and we have to pray for the grace

to carry on.

The Second Vatican Council called the church "the sinful people of God" because our history is pockmarked with sin and scandals. We don't even know how to make amends for centuries of abuse. Still we go on because of the divine element in the church.

Those who stay in the church are not blind to all the controversy and shame, but they've learned to do as Jesus asked; that is, to accept the weeds along with the wheat. They've come to understand that the church's survival is itself a miracle. Also, we learn gradually that God works through His wounded healers. He chooses imperfect instruments to carry on His saving mission. When you think about it, how could He do otherwise? There are no perfect human beings on earth. He alone is divine and therefore perfect.

We may not be strong enough, or wise

enough or good enough to live up to God's perfect plan, but we hang in there. We trust the Lord who died for our sins. "We do what we can and we pray for what we cannot yet do." (St. Augustine)

You shouldn't consider yourself hypocritical because you're a sinner. Try to do better, and if you slip, get up and try again. Don't be discouraged. Learn to laugh at your fumbling attempts at holiness.

Saints in training do not become cynical. Maybe we look foolish to the world, but Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Jesus also told us to take up our cross and follow him. He encouraged us to draw from his strength, and we do.

[For a free copy of the Christopher News Note, Saints: Past, Present, Future, write to The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St., New York, N.Y. 10017.]