

Being Catholic

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Welcome!



There are many ways to identify yourself. You may tell others your first name and your family name. You may state your address or your neighborhood. You may say you are Irish or Polish or African American. You may call yourself a southerner or a midwesterner or a Texan. Perhaps being a Yankees fan or a Miami Dolphins fan is a big part of your identity. You might want people to know that you are a Catholic.

All these characteristics and groups describe who you are and even more. As soon as you say that you are, for example, a Polish Catholic from upstate New York, you have already told a great deal about yourself. You have revealed that being Polish is important to you; you probably know a lot about snow; and you very likely know something about the Catholic religion.

Whether you live in Alaska or Alabama, whether you are Native American or Hispanic, you are able to identify yourself as Catholic. This course can help you reach a richer and deeper understanding of what it means to claim that identity. By learning more about what it means to be a Catholic, you will probe deeper into one of the great mysteries of your life—what it means to be *you!*

My Story

Complete the following sentences by writing about places, times, people, experiences, and events that you remember:

◆ My ancestors came from . . . (What country or countries did they come from?)

◆ My grandparents . . . (What were they like? What jobs did they have?)

◆ My parents . . . (Where were they born? How did they meet?)

◆ I was born . . . (Where and when were you born?)

◆ When I was a child, I . . . (Where did you live? Who were your first friends? What stories are told about you as a child?)





◆ During my first years in school, I . . . (What do you remember about your first day of school? What was your first teacher like? Who were your first school friends?)

◆ When I was in third grade, I . . . (What did you like to do most? Who were your best friends? What were some of the best things that happened that year?)

◆ In fifth grade I . . . (What did you like to do most? Who were your best friends? What were some of the best things that happened that year?)

◆ If I had only two words to describe my life so far, they would be . . . (Circle two from the following list or write your own choices on the lines provided.)

- | | | | |
|---------|-----------|---------------|-------------|
| happy | difficult | excellent | boring |
| rocky | wonderful | hectic | religious |
| easy | confusing | tough | challenging |
| calm | loving | unusual | _____ |
| sad | lonely | great | _____ |
| steady | normal | surprising | |
| amazing | unique | disappointing | |



Who am I?

My ancestors were Jewish, but I was born from a mixed marriage. In fact, from the beginning of my life, I have spoken different languages. I have had an incredible life so far—you might not believe it, but it's all true.

First of all, the earliest days of my life were filled with much suffering and pain. When I was born, the government was against me. As I grew the government thought I had political ambitions. I suffered great loss rather than deny what I stood for. I spent many years in hiding. You might say that I learned how to survive while living in underground tunnels where the government could not find me to kill me. I learned to take my first steps when the government finally allowed me my legal rights.

Then some bullies attacked me. They took all I owned and left me poor and without much of a home life.

A great feud marked my early childhood, and I was split into two parts. Each part of me feels the pain to this day and longs to be gathered into one.

I am sorry to say that I have been involved in armed warfare. Some members of my family, in our family's name, fought with others over land and religion. Even though in most cases their intention was good, the violence and death that resulted betrayed our deepest held family values. It took me a long time to realize how wrong they had been. Through all the long years of my life, I remembered and retold the stories passed down from generation to generation. I recorded the stories in languages different people could understand. I do not know how I would have survived had it not been for those great stories and the wonderful truths they contained.

Also I am an incredible artist and builder. To remind everyone of the great stories I possess, I once painted glorious pictures and constructed amazing buildings. They remain to this day.

Then I had other troubles. I allowed those who disagreed with me to be treated harshly.

Eventually I experienced another painful loss. Some of my family got into serious arguments which caused people to take sides, splitting the family up. It felt like I was being torn apart.

You know, when I look back on that event in my life, I still feel sad. That great loss made me re-examine my life and think about how I was carrying out God's will for me and the mission Jesus had given me long ago.

You have probably gone through times when you wanted to change your ways so that they would match your truest and best inner self. Maybe you decided it would help if you began by re-examining your mission in life. Well, I went through a time like that, too. I went on a retreat, and I made some decisions about how to express myself and how I will remain true to the most important values God wants me to live by and to pass on to others.

The changes I have made are exciting and a bit frustrating, but I love my life. It has been incredible so far. Throughout all of it I have tried to remember and live by the words Jesus himself addressed to me at the very beginning of my existence: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, NAB).

*Who
am I?*



Catholic
Identity

Treasure Chest

