

— Lesson 1 —

Step by Step

BELIEVE: WHY BE CATHOLIC

WHY BE CATHOLIC AND NOT JUST CHRISTIAN?

The following lesson plans illustrate how this guide can be adapted to various schedules and settings. All times listed are approximate.

30 Minutes

Handout, welcome, and Opening Prayer – 5 mins.

Video presentation – 8:59 mins.

Talk It Out (*choose two questions*) – 10 mins.

Food for Thought (*take home*)

Closing Prayer – 3 mins.

45 Minutes

Handout, welcome, and Opening Prayer – 5 mins.

Context – 3 mins.

Video presentation – 8:59 mins.

Talk It Out (*choose four questions*) – 15 mins.

Hands On – 10 mins.

Food for Thought (*take home*)

Closing Prayer – 3 mins.

60 Minutes

Handout, welcome, and Opening Prayer – 5 mins.

Context – 3 mins.

Video presentation – 8:59 mins.

Talk It Out – 25 mins.

Hands On – 10 mins.

Food for Thought (*take home*)

Closing Prayer – 3 mins.



Student Worksheet

Lesson 1: WHY BE CATHOLIC AND NOT JUST CHRISTIAN?

Opening Prayer

LEADER

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord Jesus, through the Church you give us a home, a mother, a teacher, the fullness of truth, and even your living Body. Give us eyes to see the gift that is our Catholic Faith. May the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church come alive for us and give us confidence to trust in the wisdom and authority that come from Jesus himself. Through the sacraments, may we touch the keys given to St. Peter and experience the fullness of life that they open for us. Give us ears to hear, Lord. Amen.

Fr. Mike's Thought Train

THE BIG QUESTION

What is the main difference between the Catholic Church and Protestant Christianity?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Authority

THE BREAKDOWN

- Authority means the Church has the ability to teach clearly.
- The Church is not invisible. Rather, the Church is an actual, visible body of believers with a visible structure and hierarchy established by Jesus and teaching in his name.
- The "Bible alone" (*sola scriptura*) is not enough. Not everything taught in the Bible is explicit—that is, spelled out directly and clearly. An authoritative interpreter is needed.
 - * For example, over the early centuries of Christianity, the Church was called on repeatedly to explain what Scripture taught about Jesus' nature—about his humanity and divinity.
- God would not give us an infallible book about himself and his plan of salvation without an infallible interpreter. If he did, thousands of people would have thousands of interpretations of its meaning.
- The big difference between the Catholic Faith and Protestant Christianity: authority.

Talk It Out

1. What is Fr. Mike's main point about why be Catholic?
2. Where do we get the idea that Jesus founded the Church and gave it the authority to teach in his name? How is the Church "visible" today?
3. What are some of the examples Fr. Mike presents from history when the Church's clear authority was needed?
4. Why is it important that the Church is "visible" rather than just "spiritual"?
5. Having an authority to settle disputes and to apply already-established rules is critical in our daily lives. Share a time when you were glad that there was an authority to settle a question or disagreement.
6. Fr. Mike, paraphrasing G.K. Chesterton, said, "I don't need a Church to tell me when I'm right; I need a Church to tell me when I'm wrong." Discuss what this means.
7. Do you ever struggle with accepting the authority of the Church on a particular Catholic belief? Based on Fr. Mike's presentation, how could you resolve your struggle?
8. Have you ever had difficulty reading and interpreting the Bible on your own? How does having a visible Church that teaches with authority help us understand Scripture?

Hands On

"EGG DROP" ACTIVITY:

What happened? Write your interpretation here:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Food for Thought

1. Carefully and prayerfully read Matthew 16:13-19.
 - a. What event does the text describe?
 - b. What is God saying to me personally in this passage?
 - c. Write a short prayer to Jesus based on this passage.
2. What is your relationship with authority? How do you think you can grow in this area?
3. Reflect on your experience of being Catholic. What are some of the most memorable moments so far? What do you love about the Church? What do you struggle with?

Closing Prayer

READER (MATTHEW 16:15-19)

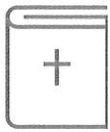
"[Jesus] said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'"

LEADER

When Peter spoke the truth about Jesus' identity and mission, Jesus spoke the truth about Peter's identity and mission. Who Peter was and what he was called to do brought the reality of the Church into clear focus. The authority and mission of Peter came from Jesus himself. If we, like Peter, have the courage to answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?", then his response to us will be similar. Who we are and what we are called to do will become clear in the light of our Catholic Faith and our relationship to the Church. How do we answer Jesus' question to Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" Let's reflect on our answers, as Jesus invites us to a clearer identity and mission in his one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.

[Pause for reflection].

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Leader's Guide

Lesson 1: WHY BE CATHOLIC AND NOT JUST CHRISTIAN?

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Understand that the authority of the Church is a defining characteristic of the Catholic Faith.
- Learn that the Church was founded by Christ upon St. Peter and the apostles—and that this is the foundation of its authority.
- Discover how the Church, from the beginning, has settled difficult questions with the authority granted by Jesus.
- Learn some critical instances where the authority of the Church has made the content of the Faith clear.
- See that the authority of the Church gives us a standard of truth.

Opening Prayer

LEADER

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord Jesus, through the Church you give us a home, a mother, a teacher, the fullness of truth, and even your living Body. Give us eyes to see the gift that is our Catholic Faith. May the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church come alive for us and give us confidence to trust in the wisdom and authority that come from Jesus himself. Through the sacraments, may we touch the keys given to St. Peter and experience the fullness of life that they open for us. Give us ears to hear, Lord. Amen.

Context

Teens and adults alike sometimes ask, “Why be Catholic? Aren’t all Christian churches the same? What does it matter if I go down the street to my friend’s church? I mean, they have inspiring music, great community, free food, and the same Jesus. So what’s the big deal?” Actually, it is a big deal—so this is a critical question to address. We need to understand what it means to be Catholic and why it matters. Only then will we know the truth about the Church and be able to share what we believe.

In this lesson’s video presentation, Fr. Mike points to the powerful—and sometimes uncomfortable—word “authority” as a defining characteristic of the Catholic Church. Because of this authority, given by Jesus himself, the Church can do more than suggest or hypothesize—it can teach definitively. In a world where standards and opinions constantly shift and move, where it can be hard to find an anchor for truth beyond emotions, the Catholic Faith is solid, unchanging, clear, and authoritative.

As you pray, listen, and discuss, be prepared for the challenging questions that come from this topic and answer in love and truth.

Video Presentation

Watch Video 1: "Why Be Catholic and Not Just Christian?"

Fr. Mike's Thought Train

THE BIG QUESTION

What is the main difference between the Catholic Church and Protestant Christianity?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Authority

THE BREAKDOWN

- **Authority means the Church has the ability to teach clearly.**
 - * *The Church teaches in Jesus' name, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the glory of the Father.*
 - * *The Church tells us what is true and what is not true.*
 - * *The Church establishes doctrine.*
- **The Church is not invisible. Rather, the Church is an actual, visible body of believers with a visible structure and hierarchy established by Jesus and teaching in his name.**
 - * *Matthew 16:13-19 recounts when Jesus explicitly establishes the role of St. Peter and the authority of the Church.*
 - * *Acts 15 presents one of the first instances of the Church's leaders acting with authority to settle the question of how non-Jews should enter the Church.*
- **The "Bible alone" (*sola scriptura*) is not enough. Not everything taught in the Bible is explicit—that is, spelled out directly and clearly. An authoritative interpreter is needed.**
 - * *For example, over the early centuries of Christianity, the Church was called on repeatedly to explain what Scripture taught about Jesus' nature—about his humanity and divinity.*
 - ✦ *Against the heresy of Docetism, the false belief that Jesus was not really human but only appeared to be, the Church affirmed that Jesus possessed a true human nature.*
 - ✦ *Against the heresy of Arianism, the false belief that Jesus was not fully God, the Church affirmed that Jesus is fully divine, "consubstantial" with God the Father and the Spirit.*
 - * *Every Christian who accepts that Jesus is God and that God is a Trinity of Persons implicitly accepts the authority of the Catholic Church. For it was Church councils in the first centuries of Christianity that clarified these core beliefs.*
- **God would not give us an infallible book about himself and his plan of salvation without an infallible interpreter. If he did, thousands of people would have thousands of interpretations of its meaning.**
- **The big difference between the Catholic Faith and Protestant Christianity: authority.**

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

Isaiah 22:20-24 – on the role of the prime minister in the kingdom of Israel

Matthew 16:13-19 – on Jesus' founding of the Church upon St. Peter

CCC (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*) 553 – on the Church's understanding of Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:15-19

Acts 15 – on settling the controversy about Gentile Christians and circumcision

CCC 465 – on Docetism and Arianism

CCC 2034 – on the authority of the papacy

Talk It Out

Objective comprehension and discussion questions

1. What is Fr. Mike's main point about why be Catholic?

Authority is his main point. If students picked up on other details, let them discuss. The first question in a discussion can become an opportunity to see what stuck with students the most. From there, guide the discussion to the central issue—the authority of the Catholic Church, which comes from Jesus himself.

2. Where do we get the idea that Jesus founded the Church and gave it the authority to teach in his name? How is the Church “visible” today?

The short answer: from Jesus himself. Focus the discussion on the dialogue between Jesus and Peter in Matthew 16:13-19. In addition, discuss how the role of the “prime minister” described in Isaiah 22 parallels Peter's role and helps us understand what Jesus intended. The Church is “visible” in its hierarchical order—the pope, bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated religious, and laity.

3. What are some of the examples Fr. Mike presents from history when the Church's clear authority was needed?

Fr. Mike notes that the authority of the Church was needed to settle the question about the circumcision of Gentiles who became Christians, along with repeated questions about Jesus' humanity and divinity. He specifically mentions the controversy of Docetism (i.e., the heretical view that Jesus only appeared to be human) and Arianism (i.e., the heretical view that Jesus was not fully divine and not co-equal with the Father). Point out to your students, as Fr. Mike does in the video, that these decisions from the early Church councils are accepted by Protestants as well—which is interesting, given that they do not accept the teaching authority of the Catholic Church.

4. Why is it important that the Church is “visible” rather than just “spiritual”?

How could an “invisible” Church teach with authority? Without a visible, hierarchical Church, we would be left to the competing interpretations of every individual reader of the Bible. This is not just a theoretical problem. When the authority of the Church has been denied in history, thousands of competing interpretations of Christianity arise. Jesus intended the Church to be visible, built on the foundation of Peter and the apostles. He chose Peter to be his “prime minister” and eleven other men to lead his followers in spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Subjective discussion questions

5. Having an authority to settle disputes and to apply already-established rules is critical in our daily lives. Share a time when you were glad that there was an authority to settle a question or disagreement.

The idea of authority being a good thing can be a hard sell, especially if your group is mostly teens. If the discussion seems to be stalling, ask if there are any athletes in the room. Then, ask them about their experience training and competing in their sport. Does each athlete make up his or her own rules? Do they challenge the authority of the coach when he or she tells them what to do? Ask if they think the authority of their parents is a good thing overall. Or, ask them what the world would be like without police, or the military, or governments—all legitimate authorities who help maintain peace and order.

The point of this question is to help students see that authority is necessary in other areas of life. Why should it be any different in the most important area—our Faith?

6. Fr. Mike, paraphrasing G.K. Chesterton, said, “I don’t need a Church to tell me when I’m right; I need a Church to tell me when I’m wrong.” Discuss what this means.

We all like to be told when we are right or to be praised when we do well. Receiving criticism or correction—even when it is constructive—is hard. But it is also necessary for growth, success, and progress. Start the discussion with such personal experiences, then shift it to considering the tough teachings of the Church as a correction and challenge that we sometimes have a hard time receiving.

This question builds on the previous question and seeks to explore how authority does more than just prevent bad things from happening. A good coach, for example, does more than simply protect an athlete from developing bad techniques or habits that would slow him or her down and maybe lead to an injury. Obeying the directions of a coach helps an athlete to achieve his or her full potential. Something similar happens in the Church—obeying Church authority helps us understand what is true and overcome bad habits that keep us from achieving who we are called to be in Christ. It frees people to live to their full potential. Point to the joy and freedom shown in the lives of St. Francis of Assisi or St. John Paul II, for instance.

7. Do you ever struggle with accepting the authority of the Church on a particular Catholic belief? Based on Fr. Mike’s presentation, how could you resolve your struggle?

The purpose of this question is to bring home the discussion from the two previous questions. This could open a can of worms, though. Take a deep breath and don’t expect to answer all the challenges that might arise. Explain that it would be impossible during this brief lesson to discuss every challenging teaching of the Church, but that several will be discussed in future lessons. Point out that people have always found certain teachings difficult to accept, even in Jesus’ time (see John 6:50–69). That is why Jesus gave his Church the authority to teach in his name—not to teach what people like but to teach what is true. Mention the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Fr. Mike’s other videos, which present the “whys” behind the Church’s teachings.

8. Have you ever had difficulty reading and interpreting the Bible on your own? How does having a visible Church that teaches with authority help us understand Scripture?

An authoritative Church not only addresses controversies but also makes the meaning of Scripture clear in the context of the whole and in light of Sacred Tradition. Discuss some things we can do to help understand a particular biblical passage, such as using a Catholic Bible commentary or using the index in the Catechism to look up topics.

Hands On

"EGG DROP" ACTIVITY

Overview

You are going to break an egg. Students will be assigned different roles so that they can interpret the event from varying perspectives. Explain that there is a need for an authoritative interpretation.

Objective

To establish the need for an authoritative interpretation of events.

Supplies

- An egg
- A large piece of plastic or newspaper
- Strips of writing paper

Instructions

Write the following identities on strips of paper:

1. A group of mother hens
 2. Omelet chefs
 3. Teens on their phones distractedly watching what is happening
 4. Vegans
 5. People at a restaurant who have been waiting an hour for their omelets
- Divide students into five groups and hand out one strip of paper to each group. Students in each group should read the paper silently and know what identity they have been assigned.
 - Arrange the groups so that everyone can see, and instruct them to watch quietly.
 - Lay out a piece of newspaper or sheet of plastic on the floor.
 - Take out an egg and drop it on the plastic or paper.
 - Have each group huddle and write a few sentences giving their take on what happened. Space is provided on the Student Worksheet.
 - Have each group read their statement and reveal their identity.
 - Say some version of the following: "A single event took place. An egg was dropped on the floor from a height of [x] feet, and it broke. Based on your perspective—on who you are, on how deeply you were paying attention, on your biases, etc.—each group had a different view of what happened. Only a single, objective event occurred—an egg was dropped and broke. The subjective viewpoint of your group, however, colored your description of what you saw. Similarly, when it comes to interpreting the content of our Faith, we need an authority to teach from a definitive perspective. The Church, founded by Jesus, is that authority."

Food for Thought

1. Carefully and prayerfully read Matthew 16:13-19.
 - a. What event does the text describe?
 - b. What is God saying to you personally in this passage?
 - c. Write a short prayer to Jesus based on this passage.
2. What is your relationship with authority? How do you think you can grow in this area?
3. Reflect on your experience of being Catholic. What are some of the most memorable moments so far? What do you love about the Church? What do you struggle with?

Closing Prayer

READER (MATTHEW 16:15-19)

"[Jesus] said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'"

LEADER

When Peter spoke the truth about Jesus' identity and mission, Jesus spoke the truth about Peter's identity and mission. Who Peter was and what he was called to do brought the reality of the Catholic Church into clear focus. The authority and mission of Peter came from Jesus himself. If we, like Peter, have the courage to answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?", then his response to us will be similar. Who we are and what we are called to do will become clear in the light of our Catholic Faith and our relationship to the Church. How do we answer Jesus' question to Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" Let's reflect on our answers, as Jesus invites us to a clearer identity and mission in his one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church.

[Pause for reflection]

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.