

# Landry: You've got questions, we've got answers

When my son started playing soccer, I was a volunteer coach trying to help him love the game. As he's gotten older, I find myself cheering from the sidelines as I have given way to coaches who better understand (and play) the sport.

Given my limited understanding of the game, I often find myself ready to voice my displeasure when a referee stops play for an infraction I've never seen before. Never having played the game at a high level, paid attention to it as a fan, or made any real serious study of it at all, no one would expect me to be a soccer expert.

We live in a culture that is often described as "post-Christian." Most people understand this to mean that we have moved away from the Christian worldview in the way many of us see the issues of the day.

In this climate, it shouldn't be surprising that those outside of the Church find some of our beliefs, practices, and moral expectations are hard to live up to. This is nothing new: Romans who interacted with early Christians heard of our belief in the Eucharist as Jesus' body and blood, and assumed that we were cannibals. In a lot of ways, this is no different than my ignorance of the rules of soccer.

What is more troubling is that a significant number of people inside the Church are having serious issues with what the Church teaches. A Pew Research study from last summer concluded that two-thirds of U.S. Catholics don't believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

On moral, hot button issues, it's fair to say that there are significant numbers of Catholics who struggle there as well. This is concerning, because it's one thing to be playing a sport where a spectator doesn't understand the rules ... it'd be another thing entirely if there was a vast swath of players who didn't get it either.

It's fair to say that we all know people who don't agree with, practise, or believe a number of things the Church does. Maybe even some of you reading this column feel the same way. This reality raises a simple question: can one be Catholic and disagree with the Church?

At first glance, it would seem that the answer is 'no.' When adults go through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) to convert to Catholicism, they are asked to make a profession of faith, stating: "I believe and profess all that the holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God."

If this is what's expected from converts, then it would stand to reason that this is what's expected of every Catholic – that we should all believe and affirm what the Church believes, teaches, and professes.

Full disclosure on this: as someone who has had the chance to spend my adult life learning and presenting Church teaching to others, I find this easy to do. At the same time, I know there are people who sit in the same pews as I do Sunday after Sunday for whom different aspects of Church teaching are problematic – and still others who've stopped coming at all.

Once again, this is nothing new. Twenty centuries of Church history have brought many arguments and questions on a variety of topics. One of the earliest such conflicts took place between St. Peter and St. Paul, as they argued whether Gentile converts to Christianity were obligated to follow Jewish dietary laws (Galatians 2:11-21).

The early centuries of the Church provided some difficult discussions about the nature of Jesus, our understanding of the Trinity, and the canon of Scripture (which books go into the Bible). It was among these discussions – which weren't always amicable – that the Nicene Creed we pray every Sunday was born.

More recently, questions around liturgy, morality, and Church authority are helping us to better understand who we are and what we're about. And as we wrestle with these things, no matter which side of the discussion we find ourselves on, there are a couple of things we might keep in mind.

For those of us in the Church who find Church teaching easy to understand, we need to be the first ones to listen charitably to others – Catholic and otherwise – who have big questions about our faith.

We ought to give the benefit of the doubt that for many of them, as is the case with me and soccer, their lack of understanding isn't malicious... it's largely due to the fact that they haven't had the same chance to explore deeper both what we believe and why. And once we've heard them out, we can take the opportunity to share the "reason for our hope" (1 Peter 3:15) – but we must be sure we do it with charity and kindness.

For those struggling with some aspect of Church teaching: Ask questions. I know that while I have a lot to learn about soccer, there are also good places to find the answers to whatever questions I have about the game itself. You should know that the same is true for you and the teachings of the Church. Look beyond Google and find a real person who loves the Church. Spend time with them, and pepper them with your best questions. Seek out the faith education options your parish offers: RCIA or a Bible study might be a good start.

My experiences of studying and sharing faith with others has taught me that there are well-thought-out answers to any question you can think of ... you often need to dig a little deeper to find the answers you seek – and know that those answers come from a God who loves you far more than you can imagine, and a

Church that wants to help you know this God more intimately.

***“Let us put ourselves into His hands, and not be startled though He leads us by a strange way, a mirabilis via, as the Church speaks. Let us be sure He will lead us right, that He will bring us to that which is, not indeed what we think best, nor what is best for another, but what is best for us.”*** -St. John Henry Newman

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