Reflection on the History of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church begins in the words and actions of Jesus Christ. From this single point of Faith emerges a tradition that has shaped Western Civilization.

The early followers of Jesus became known as “Christians.” The first Christians were Jewish and they called their community “the Church”, meaning holy assembly. The Christians proclaimed their beliefs about Jesus beyond the limited scope of Jewish society and into the larger Greco-Roman world.

The Christians first suffered persecution from Jews, later from the Roman Empire and from almost every culture that the message of Jesus was introduced. But persecution did not deter Christians from sharing their message of salvation to all people.

One of the original Twelve Apostles, named Peter, traveled from Galilee to Antioch, Corinth, and then finally to Rome, establishing or strengthening Christian communities along the way. Peter, along with a prolific early Christian preacher and author named Paul, led a zealous but small Christian community in Rome. Both were executed during a persecution led by the Emperor Nero. The first Christians in Rome were probably converts from Judaism and various pagan cults who were seeking truth or fellowship or maybe just a new deity to worship. Roman Catholicism has its origin with Peter and Paul and the first Christians of Rome.

Despite persecution, Christianity triumphed and within 250 years, gained legal status, as the reigning Roman Emperor, named Constantine, converted to Christianity. Christianity continued to spread and it flourished across Europe, East Asia and North Africa before later being carried by missionaries to all the corners of the world.

Christianity has made a lasting impact on Western Civilization. The Catholic Church preserved learning when disease, war and ignorance threatened to extinguish the treasures of the past. For 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has been on the forefront of developing philosophy, administering justice, applying the scientific method, and creating livable environments. But the most important contribution of the Catholic Church has been to preserve the dignity of and to give meaning to each person’s life.

The Roman Catholic Church is divided into local communities of faith. Each local community is called a diocese or an archdiocese. Local communities are further divided into a family of families called a parish. Parishes are lead by a pastor, who, together with other clergy and staff, cares for the spiritual and even sometimes physical needs of this community. The Celebration of the sacraments, opportunities to learn about and to share one’s experience of the Faith and the organization of programs that serve others are what constitute parish life. Additionally, in the United States, many parishes use an organized parochial school system and other ministries to share the Faith with the next generation.

Today, Assumption–Mattese Parish is a Roman Catholic Church in South St. Louis County committed to worshipping God, sharing the Good News of Jesus and serving Christ in others. All the elements of primitive Christianity, as well as the cumulative 2,000-year Catholic tradition, is celebrated here at Assumption as we still come to know, love and serve Jesus Christ in our daily lives. We hope you will come to know Jesus here too!

Questions:

Am I proud to be a Christian?
Do I share my Catholic Faith with others?
Do I live my faith to the fullest?