

# WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC

The Eucharist:  
My Anchor in the Whirlwind

by  
Elizabeth J. Sikorski



*Why I Am Still a Catholic*  
*The Eucharist:*  
*My Anchor in the Whirlwind*

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# **ABOUT THE WHY I AM STILL A CATHOLIC!**

## **A SERIES OF BOOKLETS**

**by Ronda Chervin, Ph.D., Editor**

In the year 2016 I read somewhere that 60% of Catholics have left the Church or only attend occasionally!

I was shocked! Myself a convert from an atheist but Jewish background, Jesus, manifested and coming to me in the Catholic Church is the greatest joy in my life...from time into eternity!

How could it be that so many Catholics have lost faith in a church that offers so much?

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that suggested to me a remedy.

Suppose the parish racks had little booklets written by strong believers, such as myself, describing why we are still Catholics in spite of many of the same experiences which have alienated other Catholics! Such a series of booklets could attract wavering Catholics or be given by strong Catholics to family and friends who have left us. In this way our series was born.

So, now I address all wavering Catholics, and

all those who have left the Catholic faith, and beg you to give us one more chance. Could it hurt to say a little prayer, such as this?

*Jesus, if you are really the Son of God, and you want me to receive fullness of grace through the Word and Sacraments in the Catholic Church, open me to the witness of the writers of these booklets. As they tell me why they are still Catholics, please tell me why I should still be a Catholic!*



Elizabeth Sikorski earned her B.S. in Education and English, with a minor in Secondary Education from Eastern Connecticut State University in 1984. She also earned a Connecticut State Teaching Certification the same year. She received her M.A. in Theology in 1993 from Holy Apostles College and Seminary. Mrs. Sikorski was inducted into the *Who's Who Among American Teachers* in 2005. Mrs. Sikorski retired from teaching in 2015 after more than 30 years in the classroom. She enjoys retirement with her amateur photographer husband, Paul, and her two cats; BoBo and Mr. Skittish.



★ He volunteered for ★  
**SUBMARINE SERVICE**



It's likely that everyone reading this knows someone who has left the practice of their Catholic faith. Maybe a family member, a friend or a co-worker who at some point in their lives became disillusioned with or confused about the Catholic faith and chose to leave. I was recently asked why I am still Catholic in today's increasingly secular culture. I didn't hesitate giving my reasons. For me, I am still Catholic primarily because of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Penance and all the fruits and blessings these two precious Sacraments have provided for me.

I was born to parents one of whom was a cradle Catholic, my father, and the other, my mother, a baptized Lutheran. Within a few years of their marriage in 1946, my mother was received into the fullness of the Catholic faith. My father was a Navy



submariner for 28 years and then worked for the Naval Intelligence Service until he was 80 years old. My mother was a stay at home mom.

Together, they raised 11 children during their 53 years of marriage. They both loved and practiced the Catholic faith and taught my 5 brothers and 5 sisters and me to love it and practice it as well.



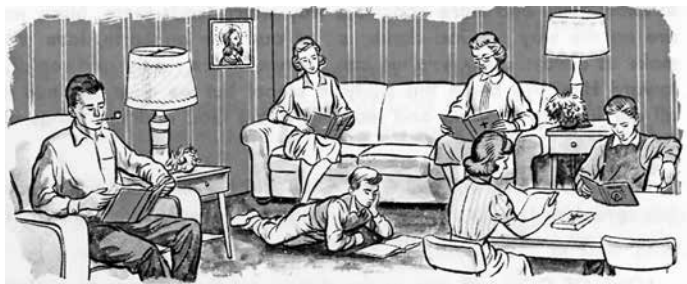
Since my father was often deployed for six to nine months at a time, the task of teaching us the Catholic faith fell to my mom. She taught us our prayers, including the Rosary. She sang to us and showed us how to love God in word and deed. Both mom and dad had a special devotion to Our Blessed Mother, and passed that love on to us. It is true

that old saying — dads are the head of the family, and moms are the heart of the family.

Whenever possible, during our many duty stations across the country and different states, my parents sent us to Catholic schools, often at great financial sacrifice. The first and last three years of my education were in Catholic schools. In between, I attended public schools and attended CCD classes. I don't remember anyone apologizing for



being a Catholic in those days or being in any way reluctant to talk about the Catholic faith in public schools. Times certainly have changed since those halcyon days of my youth.

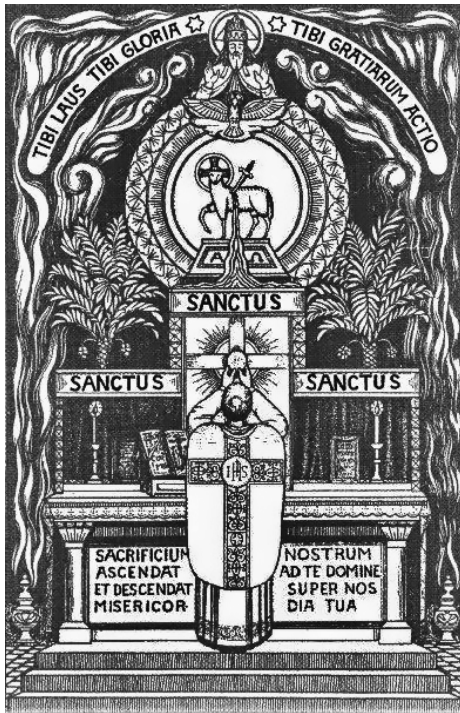


Growing up, we always went to Mass on Sundays as a family, unless one of my brothers had to serve an early Mass. We prayed the Rosary together, and learned from our parents what it meant to



be faithful. My parent's love and devotion to each other and us were the greatest example of Eucharistic love for me. Because we moved around often during the early years of my parent's marriage, my siblings and I had to say goodbye to friends, and meet new ones quite frequently. It was my good fortune to have had good friends, no matter where we lived. It turned out to be a great blessing for me.

I realized that even though we lived in different cities, had to adjust to new homes and new schools, somehow the inside of the Church was the same everywhere we lived. It became the familiar anchor for me with each move. I also appreciated that the Mass was celebrated the same regardless of where my dad ended up being stationed. From Hawaii to California, from South Carolina to Virginia, the one common denominator for me in the midst of all the changes was the inside of the Church. That provided much needed stability for me.



My family moved one last time the summer after I graduated from high school. I found myself cut off from all my high school friends and felt alone a lot. That's when I began to truly appreciate the joy of going to daily Mass, and also the tremendous value of the Sacrament of Penance.

To fill up my time while looking for work, I picked out a book from my dad's voluminous library. It was Frank Sheed's *Theology and Sanity*. Each page I read made so much sense. When I finished, I wanted to read more from him. I found *A Map of Life*. The words really spoke to me. Why hadn't they taught this in school, I wondered. I moved on to reading from the intellectual and spiritual giants like C. S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, Peter Kreeft and others. The wisdom of these authors truly enriched my daily Mass experience, especially the Scriptures. I was confronted with my own personal weaknesses and sins, and these lovers of Christ led me to seek a closer and more authentic living encounter with Our Lord Jesus Christ.

There was one particular experience with the Sacrament of Penance around that time that has stayed with me. As a young adult, I suffered from the usual spiritual bumps and bruises along the path toward Heaven, like everyone else. I still do. For me, preparing for and going to Confession had

been a bit of a strain, but the results of confronting my sins and bringing them before Our Lord Jesus Christ for healing always left me refreshed and renewed to continue the struggle toward sainthood.

That Confession, many years ago, and the penance assigned to me has continued to bear fruit in my life. The priest,



whose name I will never know, did more for me that day to guide and direct me toward a continued desire to grow closer to my faith, my Church, and my God. After that experience, I was no longer afraid to go to Confession, no matter who the priest was. I am forever grateful to that priest, who, in the name of Jesus, brought healing and forgiveness to me. To be reconciled with Christ and His Church is indescribable.

As a result of that long ago Confession, I developed a deeper appreciation for the role of the priest in my faith life. Not only did he have the power to confect the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and re-present the salvific work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, he had the power to heal, to the very depths of one's soul. Through the sacramental priesthood, Jesus invited me personally to journey

with Him to Calvary, and then His Resurrection, each and every day. At times, the thought that I am invited each day to take Our Lord's hand, to receive Him completely in Holy Communion is too awesome to put into words.

I became a daily Mass communicant when I began my first real job after high school. My father worked at the Pentagon and I worked at the Bureau of Naval Personnel, at the time located in Arlington, VA. We drove together to work and Dad would drop me off and head to the Pentagon. It was during those daily rides to and from work each day that I truly got to know my dad. We developed a special bond in time and I came to understand how important his Catholic faith was to him, the role it had played in his life and why he wanted to share that with his children.

Since I arrived at work so early in the morning, I decided to utilize the time by going to morning Mass. Back then, there weren't any complaints about having religious services in a military office building. Mass was celebrated daily in an auditorium with a make shift portable altar. The auditorium seated about 200, and every day, at least half of the seats were filled with Mass attendees.

At first, I felt a bit out of place. I think I was one of the youngest people at daily Mass, and for sure,

one of only a few civilians. Most of the military personnel were Naval officers and enlisted men and women. I was at ease with all the uniforms and brass, having grown up in a military family myself. From admirals to seaman recruits, from office managers to file clerks, we worshipped together each morning before we began our workday. I learned a great deal about life, faith, humility and charity as I sat among both the powerful and not so powerful each morning.

As the days passed, I came to realize that when the Chaplain began each Mass with the Sign of the Cross, for a brief time, it didn't matter what rank or branch of the military was present, or even how important or ordinary our jobs were in that building. We were all poor sinners, praying together as one family at the mercy seat of the Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ for that half hour. That realization touched me deeply and like a magnet drew me to return every morning to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

The more often I went to weekday Mass, the more at home I felt there. The delight of knowing that I had taken a few moments at the beginning of each day to spend with Jesus Christ brought great comfort. I soon began to recognize the same faces of those who joined me in choosing to begin the day in prayer and I liked that feeling.

Spending time in prayer at the beginning of each day helped me not only with the struggles of embracing adulthood and all the challenges that came with that process, but also being drawn deeper into a more personal relationship with Our Lord Jesus.



For those who say they “don’t get anything out of going to Mass”, I have to say that my experience of daily Mass led me to listen more closely to the prayers and Scripture and to really “pray” those prayers, and to more deeply reflect on the Scriptures I heard each day. I grew to admire the military

men and women who sat next to me each morning at Mass. Clearly they found value in humbling themselves before Our Lord at daily Mass, thereby receiving spiritual guidance before making critical decisions that affected millions of people, military and civilian. I am forever grateful to those humble men and women of our brave Armed Forces for showing me such a good example of what it meant to be in leadership positions. Those anonymous men and women taught me that every good leader is always humble first, in imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

During my time working for the Navy in Virginia, I met the man who would become my husband. After he finished his military service and completed his undergraduate education, we married in 1973 and moved to Connecticut.

The excitement of married life soon gave way to homesickness for my family. I missed all the activity that my brothers and sisters had going on in their lives. Mostly, I missed my mom and dad. They had helped me clean up the many messes caused by my selfishness and sinfulness. In spite of my weaknesses, Dad and Mom never once made me feel like I was unloved and unforgiven. Their example of such unconditional love and forgiveness became the model of Christ's love and forgiveness in my life.



I found solace in going to daily Mass, which was the one familiar place for me in the midst of all the newness of the sacramental vocation of marriage, lifestyle and home. I knew my Mom and Dad were also daily Mass communicants, as much as their daily responsibilities would allow, so when I went to Mass each morning in Connecticut, I would “spend time with them” each day at Mass through the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, albeit long distance.

Even though by this time I had been going to daily Mass for several years, I realized that Mass never got “boring” for me. As the cycles of readings came and went, I learned something new each time I heard the same Scriptures and prayed the same prayers. There was a real freshness in each Mass I participated in, and yet I hungered for the familiar rhythm of the Mass. I began to understand the Mass and appreciate both its simplicity and its mystery the more I participated in it. The Eucharist enabled me to delve deeper into the mystery of the work of our salvation by Jesus



Christ, and to see the Cross in my everyday life as a true uniting of my life with Christ. There is a saying that goes, “nothing unites two people more closely together than shared suffering”. That truth embedded itself into me with each cross Our Lord has given to my husband and me and has allowed me to continue my journey toward a deeper union with Christ by seeing how suffering can be a true path toward Christ and holiness. I came to the realization that everything that happens in life, and I mean everything; joys and sorrows, has passed through the merciful hands of Our Lord Jesus Christ first and always has blessings attached to those sufferings.



Anyone who is married and reading this knows that within every marriage, there are both joys and struggles. Sometimes the struggles are self-imposed, caused by the effects of Original Sin.

Other problems arise that could not be foreseen. When we got married, my husband and I chose Natural Family Planning from the beginning. NFP was relatively new back then and was just coming on the scene as a moral means toward responsible parenthood for Catholics and other people of faith. It was the era of the release of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and the whole contraception movement. Because we practiced NFP, my husband and I learned fairly early in our marriage that the chances of having children naturally were very slim. It was a terrible disappointment for us but we came to understand that sometimes, God withholds precious gifts from us. It took a lot of faith, prayers and support for us to come to understand that sharing in the Cross of Christ during those difficult and trying years could have resulted in hatred and bitterness. But — and I truly believe this — going to daily Mass during that whole ordeal actually cemented our love and marriage.

Certainly many tears were shed, and frustrations bubbled up at times, but we always tried to end the day asking for forgiveness for cross words or selfish actions. The spiritual graces gained through daily Mass not only kept our marriage from what could have been a disaster, it actually helped us grow in our love for each other.

The relentless ache to hold a baby in my arms led me to check into adoption. The first place I went for information was to Catholic Charities. The woman behind the counter was very pleasant when I asked her about adoption, but she told me that the waiting list for newborns was 9 years! We would be ineligible to adopt by that time because my husband would have been too old. Back then, the rules and requirements for adoption were quite restrictive. My heart sank as I walked out of the building. After a while, I checked into private adoptions. Again, I ran into problems, not the least of which was that there were simply no babies to adopt. In the county where I lived, there were 100 couples seeking to adopt and only one infant available. The scourge of the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade* had robbed us of our dreams and hopes to become parents. My husband and I decided to leave it in God's hands. If it was meant to be, it would happen. God's will be done.

When it became clear that having children of our own wasn't in our future, I decided to go back to school to become a teacher. It makes me smile even to this day to think that, back when I worked for the Navy, my father always said I'd make a good teacher. My future plans at that time had centered on wanting to be a housewife and mother. That was the career I dreamed of, following in the footsteps

of my beloved mother. I thought my dad was crazy to suggest that, but it turned out he was right about that, and many other things as well.

I managed to attend daily Mass while taking undergraduate college classes. Going back to college after having worked in the real world was quite an experience. There, I found myself the oldest student in most of my classes. I felt that I had a bit of an edge over most of my classmates because I had been a paraprofessional in a special needs class for three years before returning to college.

After I completed graduation requirements and acquired my teaching certification, I applied for and was selected to teach Theology at a Catholic high school. For me, it was the perfect job. Once again, I was able to go to Mass every



day right on campus. I spent 30 years teaching my students about Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church, the Sacraments, Catholic Morality, Scripture, the

Saints and current events. My students were my teachers as much as I was theirs, and I learned so much more from them about my faith. They taught me to be a better person. My students were the children God intended to fill my life.

There were times when my students, both Catholic and non-Catholic would ask why I was Catholic. I tried to keep my answers pithy, and that always paid off. Memorable classroom discussions often followed. Many students were interested in knowing more about why I loved the Mass and Confession. I found it a great way to evangelize not only my non-Catholic students, but the Catholics as well. Sadly, only about 20 percent of my students who were baptized Catholic actually practiced their faith. I always thought it sad that parents who stopped practicing their Catholic faith never thought to take spiritual care of their children.

One of the great joys of being a teacher in a Catholic school was when students who hadn't been particularly interested in their Catholic faith developed a renewed interest in it because of the example and witness of faithful Catholic students, both in word and action. Their witness to Jesus Christ was often contagious to students who were still searching for something or someone to believe in. Another of my greatest joys during my teaching career was being invited to the Baptisms,

Confirmations and First Holy Communions of students who discovered or, perhaps, re-discovered their love and desire for a deeper relationship with Jesus and chose to seek Him with renewed faith in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church.



During my years as a high school Theology teacher, I constantly searched for ways to stimulate my students into delving deeper into the Catholic faith. The battle between the secular culture and Christianity, especially in this day and age required special armor and tactics. Perhaps some reading this article rue the age of the computer, the internet and social media. Since my students were immersed in these areas, I began to investigate ways to use cyberspace as a means to engage my students. As I searched for more information about how the Church was using these tools, I found a whole new world of spiritual growth and information on the internet.



I was delighted to discover so many authentic Catholic websites with formats to accommodate whatever type of information someone was seeking. From *EWTN* to *Catholic Answers* to the *Institute of Catholic Culture*, to *Word on Fire Ministries*, to *FOCUS*, and more, the internet was full of guidance, instruction, and up-to-date news about the Catholic Church at my fingertips. With a click of the mouse, I could visit the Vatican Archives, pull up the latest papal encyclical, take a tour of the Holy Land or listen to a fantastic homily on the Sunday readings. Certainly there are potential problems with bogus websites and unorthodox information, but I wanted my students to at least be aware of the treasure trove of great Catholic information out there if they searched carefully. I developed several types of assignments that required my students to go into cyberspace



in search of Christ and His truth. Based on their feedback, my efforts were not in vain. Many were grateful for the opportunity to use their computers, iPads or iPhones to not only complete the required work, but to learn more about the Catholic faith. I won't even begin to mention the hundreds of Catholic apps available for prayer, meditation, music, news and discussion.

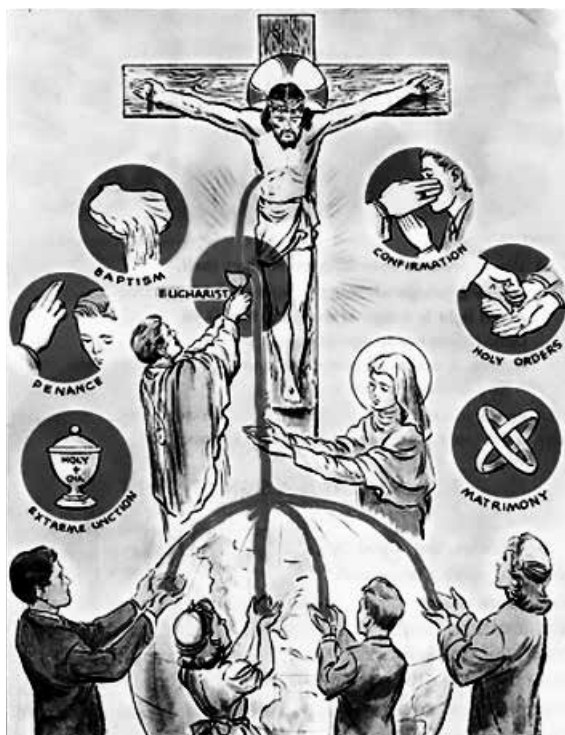
My mom and dad taught me to love music. It was natural for me to seek out and find a church choir to join when I moved to Connecticut. Since I belonged to the Cathedral parish, I joined the Cathedral choir of the diocese in which I lived. The choir director is not a Catholic, although he probably knows more about the Catholic liturgy than many baptized Catholics. At Midnight Mass one Christmas many years ago, the bishop encouraged the congregation to be better evangelizers — to invite someone we knew who was not a Catholic to come and explore the Catholic faith. I took the opportunity right then and there to invite my choir director to think about becoming a Catholic. He smiled and thanked me for the invitation. He, in turn, invited me to become a member of the Protestant church to which he belonged. I thanked him, and told him politely that I didn't think I could do without the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance for the rest of my life. To leave the Catholic Church

would mean to give up the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Penance. I'd be walking away from devotions to the Blessed Mother, the lives of the Saints, the beautiful prayers of the Rosary, Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, the great feasts of the liturgical year. That I knew I couldn't do. However, the experience did make me reflect on how much and how often Our Lord invites us to come to Him for mercy, healing, love, and yes, even giving Himself to us personally in the Sacraments daily. It was a good lesson for me and certainly made me more grateful for those many gifts Our Lord has bestowed on us for our spiritual benefit.

Several years after I began teaching Theology at a Catholic high school, an opportunity arose to take graduate courses in Theology from Holy Apostles College and Seminary, located in Cromwell, Connecticut. The college started a satellite site offering graduate courses in the evening at the school where I was teaching. I seized on the opportunity to take classes to further my education and teaching skills. I enrolled in classes, and loved every course I took.

From Scripture to Liturgy, Morality and Church History to Bioethics, I devoured the material the learned professors taught. The challenge of teaching full time and going to classes at night was

not unfamiliar to me, because I had done it before, but this educational experience was unique. My graduate studies better equipped me to pass on to my students a richer learning experience. Sharing what I was learning with my students gave both them and me a more in depth examination of issues relevant to their lives. It is one thing to know the truth; it is quite another to be able to articulate the truth to others. My graduate education facilitated the ability to find expression for such sublime truths.



I owe fitting tribute to one professor in particular, Father William Heidt, OSB. He was one of the original professors at the satellite school. His courses in Scripture were the epitome of rigorous study and passionate faith. His intellectual acumen and wisdom were contagious. And yet, he was such a humble man. For all of his scholarly accomplishments, and he had many, he was a wise yet simple monk who loved Our Lord Jesus Christ and wanted to pass that love onto his students. I enrolled in every course he offered at the satellite site.



There were other professors during those five years whose intellectual gifts, wisdom and authenticity made learning about the faith so much richer. They were, like Father Heidt, accomplished authors and scholars. Most of my graduate professors were priests, which was a great gift. All of the professors were faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church. It gave me great comfort to know that the Catholic faith was taught in all its beauty and truth according to the Magisterial teachings of the Catholic Church. The core of every class was fidelity and faithfulness to Christ and His Church. Each course I took enriched my

daily Mass experience and drew me deeper into my relationship with Our Lord.

When the satellite site ended, I had to drive to the campus to complete my graduate studies. Once again, I had professors, most of them priests, who joyfully shared their knowledge of and love for Christ and His teachings. I still reflect on those years with thanksgiving and gratitude for everything they taught me.

It has been my good fortune to have met so many good and holy priests. Perhaps that is because of going to daily Mass. I see their faithful witness, bringing Our Lord Jesus Christ to the faithful most fully and completely in the daily celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacrament of Confession. Their fidelity continues to stir the desire in me to seek a more profound and authentic relationship with the author of Love, Jesus Christ. In spite of the priestly scandals the Catholic Church has faced in the recent past, my faith in the teachings of the Catholic Church and especially the sacramental priesthood has never wavered. I am keenly aware of the effects of Original Sin in the world, and in my own life. I know, also, that the only remedy for my spiritual sickness, and that of the whole world, is Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord.

Without the Eucharist and Confession, I have

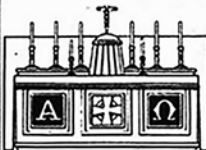
no idea where I would be today in terms of my relationship with Christ and His Church. I only know that these Sacraments and their spiritual fruits and graces have steadied the course of my life and continue to provide me with the joy of knowing that my love for Our Lord Jesus Christ will endure in spite of the crosses I am blessed to carry each day. These sacraments, especially daily Mass, have been my anchor through life's mountains and valleys. More importantly, I continue to explore to even greater heights the divine love of My Lord on my journey toward Christ and Eternal life through the sacramental life of the Church.



# SYMBOLS of the CHURCH

YOU HAVE SEEN THE PICTURES OF ANIMALS, PLANTS, AND OTHER THINGS THAT ARE ON THE WALLS AND WINDOWS OF YOUR CHURCH. DO YOU KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN? THESE PICTURES ARE CALLED SYMBOLS.

(A SYMBOL IS SOMETHING THAT STANDS FOR SOMETHING ELSE.) EVER SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHURCH, THEY HAVE BEEN USED TO TEACH THE TRUTHS OF OUR RELIGION.



THE GREEK LETTERS ALPHA (Α) AND OMEGA (Ω) OFTEN APPEAR ON THE FRONT OF ALTARS. THESE TWO LETTERS ARE THE FIRST AND LAST LETTERS OF THE GREEK ALPHABET. THEY SHOW THAT GOD IS THE BEGINNING AND END OF ALL THINGS.



THE DOVE REPRESENTS THE HOLY GHOST.



THE CROSS STANDS FOR FAITH.



THE ANCHOR STANDS FOR HOPE.



THE HEART STANDS FOR LOVE, OR CHARITY



THE MOST IMPORTANT SYMBOL, OF COURSE, IS THE CROSS. THE ORDINARY CROSS, CALLED THE LATIN CROSS, REPRESENTS THE CRUCIFIXION OF OUR LORD. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF CROSSES. HERE ARE THE PICTURES OF SOME OF THEM.



THE FISH WAS A FAVORITE SYMBOL OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS. IT REPRESENTS OUR LORD.



A SHIP IS THE SYMBOL OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.



THE CHI RHO (Ϟ) IS MADE OF TWO GREEK LETTERS, THE CHI (Χ), WHICH LOOKS LIKE OUR LETTER "X", AND THE RHO (Ρ), WHICH LOOKS LIKE OUR LETTER "P". CHI AND RHO ARE THE FIRST TWO LETTERS OF THE GREEK WORD FOR CHRIST. THE CHI RHO IS A SYMBOL OF OUR LORD.



EARS OF WHEAT AND BUNCHES OF GRAPES ARE SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST. BREAD IS MADE FROM WHEAT, AND WINE IS MADE FROM GRAPES. THEY REPRESENT THE BODY AND BLOOD OF OUR LORD.

## PREVIOUS BOOKLETS IN THIS SERIES

Vol. 1: To Whom Shall We Go

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to Daily Mass Catholic

Vol. 3: From the Land of Oz  
to the Subversive Nazarene Truth

Vol. 4: From Fear to Love

Vol. 5: From Ex-Catholic  
to Joyful Catholic

Vol. 6: The Music of My Faith

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