

How I Got Here: My Two Years Looking Into the Catholic Church

1. Why I Wanted to Write This Down

I start Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) on August 25, 2026. Even writing that down feels a little strange because two years ago I really do not think I would have guessed that this is where I was headed. I did not start looking into Catholicism because I had already decided it was true. I also did not have one moment where everything suddenly clicked and I was ready to become Catholic. It has been much slower than that.

Most of this has been me finding something that bothered me, digging into it, thinking I had an answer, and then realizing there was another question underneath it. Sometimes the Catholic answer was stronger than I expected. Sometimes I thought the Catholic argument was being overstated and I had to keep looking. There were also times when I found out that the version of a Catholic belief I was arguing against was not actually what the Church teaches.

That is probably the main reason I wanted to write this. I do not want to make the last two years sound cleaner than they were. I have gone back and forth on things. Mary took me a long time. The Eucharist was hard for a different reason. The papacy and infallibility raised a whole set of historical questions. But over time the big pieces started fitting together, and now I am at the point where I am pretty much on board with the major dogmas of the Church. I still want to understand some of them better, but that is different from thinking they are false.

2. Where I Started

When I first started looking seriously at Catholicism, my instinct was basically to take each Catholic teaching one at a time and ask, "Where is that in the Bible?" I still think that is a fair question. What changed is that I eventually realized it could not be the only question.

I was used to thinking of Christianity mainly as the Bible and then the believer trying to understand what the Bible says. Catholicism forced me to ask what happened before there was a completed New Testament, how the earliest Christians knew what counted as Scripture, and what kind of authority Jesus actually left with the apostles.

At first I did not really see why that mattered so much. Then I started noticing passages I had read before without thinking much about them. Acts 15 was one. The early Church has a real dispute over circumcision and the law of Moses, and the answer is not just that everybody should read Scripture and decide for themselves. The apostles and elders meet, debate it, make a decision, and send that decision to the churches. First Timothy 3:15 calls the Church the pillar and foundation of the truth. Second Thessalonians 2:15 tells Christians to hold to what they were taught both by word and by letter.

None of those verses by themselves made me Catholic. What they did was make me less comfortable with the idea that Christianity was supposed to be Scripture separated from a teaching Church. That was probably the first crack in the way I had been looking at everything.

3. The Authority Question Got Bigger Than I Expected

The canon of Scripture became a big part of this for me too. The Bible does not give us an inspired table of contents. Christians had to recognize which books were apostolic and which ones were not. I realized I was already depending on the early Church at one of the most basic levels, even if I had never really thought of it that way.

That led to a question I kept coming back to: if I trust the early Church to recognize the New Testament, what did that Church actually believe about authority, worship, bishops, the Eucharist, baptism, and everything else?

This is where the conversation stopped being just Catholic verses versus Protestant verses. I started caring a lot more about what the first Christians thought they had received from the apostles. I did not want to assume that everything Catholic was a medieval invention, but I also did not want to assume Catholic claims were true just because they were old. I wanted to see what was actually there.

4. The Early Church Was Not What I Expected

The Church Fathers were probably the biggest historical surprise for me. The closer I got to the apostles, the less the Church looked like the simplified version of early Christianity I had in my head.

Ignatius of Antioch really stood out. He is writing very early, close to the apostolic period, and he talks naturally about the bishop, presbyters, deacons, unity with the bishop, and the Eucharist. Justin Martyr describes Christian worship in the second century and says the Eucharist is not received as common bread and drink. Irenaeus talks about apostolic succession when he is answering false teachers and points to the succession of bishops as a way of identifying the public apostolic faith.

What got me was not that every early writer sounded exactly like a modern catechism. They do not. The language develops, and some questions were not even being asked yet. What got me was the overall shape of the Church. There were bishops. There was a sacramental way of talking about Christianity. There was a real concern with apostolic succession and visible Church authority. The Eucharist was treated as much more than a symbol.

That was hard for me to explain if the basic Catholic view of the Church was supposed to have appeared much later. I started asking a different question. Instead of, "When did Catholics invent all of this?" I found myself asking, "Why is so much of this already here so early?"

5. The Eucharist Was Probably the Biggest Shift

The Eucharist ended up becoming one of the biggest turning points for me. At first the Real Presence was one of those Catholic teachings that seemed like it had to be too literal. Bread still looks like bread. Wine still looks like wine. And I was used to understanding Communion mainly as a memorial and symbol of what Jesus did.

John 6 started making more sense once I stopped treating it as an isolated argument about one or two verses. The chapter begins around Passover. Jesus feeds the five thousand. The crowd brings up Moses and the manna. Then Jesus says the Father gives the true bread from heaven and identifies himself as the Bread of Life. Eventually he says the bread he will give for the life of the world is his flesh.

I know the Protestant reading because it is the reading I was used to: eating means believing. Faith is absolutely part of John 6. I do not think Catholics should pretend it is not. What became hard for me was saying that eating means nothing more than believing, especially after the language becomes more concrete and the disciples react by calling it a hard saying. Some of them leave, and Jesus does not call them back to explain that he only meant it symbolically. Then the Last Supper and Paul made it harder. Jesus says, "This is my body" and "This is my blood." In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul calls the cup a participation in the blood of Christ and the bread a participation in the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11 he warns that receiving unworthily makes someone guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

What really pushed me was seeing the biblical evidence beside the early Christian evidence. Ignatius speaks about people who deny that the Eucharist is the flesh of Jesus Christ. Justin says Christians do not receive it as common bread and drink. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Cyril,

Ambrose and others all speak in a way that is much stronger than "this bread reminds us of Jesus."

At some point I had to admit that the symbolic-only explanation was starting to require more work for me than the Catholic one. I did not suddenly understand every detail of transubstantiation, but I became convinced that the earliest Christian belief was that something real is happening in the Eucharist. Today the Real Presence is not one of the things keeping me from Catholicism. It is one of the biggest reasons I am drawn to it.

6. Mary Took the Most Work

Mary was probably the area I resisted the longest. From the outside, Catholic devotion to Mary can look like one of the clearest reasons not to become Catholic. The prayers, statues, feast days, Rosary, titles, and then the four Marian dogmas can all pile up and make it look like Mary has been placed where Jesus should be.

The first thing I had to do was separate what the Church actually teaches from what it can look like from the outside. Catholicism does not teach that Mary is a goddess. It does not teach that she is equal to Jesus. It does not teach that she saves apart from Christ. Worship belongs to God alone. Catholics honor Mary because of what God did in her and because of her relationship to Christ.

6.1. Mother of God

The title Mother of God became easier once I understood that it is really a statement about Jesus. Mary did not create the divine nature of the Son. The point is that the person born from her is the eternal Son who became man. Jesus is not two persons, one human and one divine. So if Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Jesus is God the Son incarnate, the title protects the identity of Christ more than it elevates Mary.

That doctrine stopped bothering me pretty quickly once I understood what the argument was actually about.

6.2. The Perpetual Virginity

The perpetual virginity was harder. The references to Jesus' brothers and sisters looked pretty straightforward to me at first. I had to spend time on how kinship words are used in Scripture, the meaning of "until," the other Marys connected with James and Joses, and Jesus giving Mary to John at the cross.

I also spent time with Jerome's argument against Helvidius because this was not just a modern Catholic response made up to answer Protestants. Christians were debating the same passages a long time ago. I still think this is one of the Marian doctrines where a person has to look at the whole case instead of expecting one verse to settle it, but I no longer think the Catholic position is forced or unreasonable. I accept it.

6.3. The Immaculate Conception

The Immaculate Conception was difficult in a different way because it is easy to misunderstand the claim. It is about Mary's conception, not the virgin birth of Jesus. The Church is saying that Mary was preserved from original sin by the grace of Christ, not that she did not need a Savior. I had to think through the New Eve theme, the way Gabriel addresses Mary in Luke 1, and the broader idea that God can save someone by preventing a fall as well as by rescuing someone after the fall. I also had to be careful with the early writers because I did not want to claim they explicitly taught the 1854 definition when they did not. What I found was a real development in

how Christians spoke about Mary's holiness and her place in the new creation. That development makes more sense to me now than it did when I first heard the doctrine.

6.4. The Assumption

The Assumption may have been the Marian teaching I was most frustrated with because I wanted actual evidence, not just the statement that the Church teaches it. I kept going back to this one because weak arguments were not enough for me.

I eventually had to separate two questions: whether Scripture gives us a direct story of Mary's Assumption, and whether the belief can still belong to the Church's received tradition and later be formally defined. There is no New Testament passage that simply narrates Mary's Assumption. I think Catholics should be honest about that.

What changed for me was the cumulative case: Mary's biblical role, the Ark imagery, the woman of Revelation 12, the very early and widespread tradition surrounding her Dormition and Assumption, the absence of a competing ancient tradition claiming her bodily remains, and the way the belief fits with the Church's understanding of Mary in salvation history. I wanted more than "the Church says so," and after spending a lot of time on it I think there is more there than I originally gave it credit for. I am now willing to accept the doctrine, even though it is still one I want to keep studying historically.

6.5. The Rosary and Marian Devotion

The Rosary also looked strange to me at first, especially the repetition. Once I looked at how it developed and what a person is actually supposed to be doing while praying it, it made more sense. The point is not to mindlessly say the same words over and over. The prayers give a rhythm while the person meditates on the life of Christ through the mysteries.

The first half of the Hail Mary is rooted directly in Luke, and the mysteries are about the incarnation, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, and glory of Jesus. I do not think every Christian is going to have the same level of Marian devotion, and I am still learning what my own devotional life will look like. But I no longer look at the Rosary and think, "This proves Catholics worship Mary." I do not think that argument holds up once the Catholic distinction between worship and veneration is understood.

7. Peter, the Papacy, and Infallibility

The papacy was another major hurdle. I could see that Peter was important, but I was not convinced that being important automatically gave us the modern papacy. That part took more work.

Matthew 16 mattered because Jesus gives Peter the keys of the kingdom. Luke 22 mattered because Jesus prays specifically for Peter and then tells him to strengthen his brothers. John 21 mattered because Jesus repeatedly tells Peter to feed and tend his sheep. I started to see a pattern that was stronger than just saying Peter happened to be the loudest apostle.

Then I had to deal with Rome historically. Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Irenaeus, and later controversies showed me that Rome did have a special place very early. I still think the exact development of papal jurisdiction is something worth studying carefully. I do not think every later detail appears fully formed in the first century. But I also do not think the papacy can honestly be dismissed as something a medieval pope simply invented.

Papal infallibility became easier after I stopped confusing it with the idea that popes are always right. Church history makes that impossible. There have been bad popes, weak popes, political popes, sinful popes, and popes who made terrible decisions. The Catholic claim is much

narrower: under specific conditions the pope, or the bishops united with him, can definitively teach the Church on faith and morals without binding the Church to error.

Oddly enough, studying bad popes did not end up destroying the Catholic case for me. It made me ask how the Church survived some of them without one of them simply rewriting the faith around his own sins or politics. I do not think bad leadership proves infallibility, but I also no longer think a bad pope is a contradiction of the doctrine. The Church never claimed the pope would be impeccable.

8. A Lot of the Other “Catholic Stuff” Started Fitting Together

Once the bigger questions about authority, the Church, and the sacraments started changing, some of the other Catholic teachings stopped feeling as random.

Confession is a good example. My first reaction was basically, "Why would I need to tell a priest when I can confess directly to God?" Catholics do not teach that a Christian cannot pray directly to God for forgiveness. The real question is whether Christ also gave the apostles a ministry of reconciliation. John 20:21-23 is hard to ignore once Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on them and speaks about forgiving and retaining sins.

Purgatory also sounded worse before I understood what Catholics mean by it. It is not a second chance at salvation and it is not a place where someone earns heaven after death. It is the final purification of someone who dies in God's friendship. I still want to understand all of the biblical passages and historical development better, but the actual doctrine is much more reasonable than the caricature I had in my head.

The saints were similar. Asking a saint to pray for me originally sounded like talking to the dead in a forbidden way. The Catholic answer depends on the communion of saints: Christians who die in Christ are still alive in Christ, and the Church is not divided into two unrelated bodies just because some members are in heaven. I can see the difference now between asking another member of Christ's body for prayer and trying to summon a spirit for secret knowledge or power. The more I understood the Catholic idea of the Church as one body, the sacraments as real means of grace, and heaven and earth as still united in Christ, the less these practices felt like disconnected Catholic add-ons.

9. What Has Actually Changed in Me

I think the biggest change over the last two years is not that I memorized a bunch of Catholic answers. It is that the way I ask the questions changed.

I used to approach almost every doctrine by asking whether I could personally prove it from a few verses. Now I still want the biblical case, but I also ask what the apostles handed on, what the earliest Christians believed, how doctrine developed, and whether Christ actually gave the Church authority to settle questions that individual Christians may never settle on their own.

I have also gotten much more cautious about easy arguments on both sides. I do not want a weak Catholic quote from a Church Father just because it supports the conclusion I want. I also do not want a Protestant objection that only works by describing Catholic teaching incorrectly. I have spent a lot of time checking quotations, reading context, and going back when I thought one of our studies was too weak. That process has actually helped my confidence more than pretending every issue is simple.

There are doctrines where I used to think, "There is no way I could ever believe that," and now I am either convinced or at least understand why the Church teaches it. That has happened enough times that I have had to take the Church's claim to teaching authority much more seriously.

10. Why I Finally Started OCIA

For a long time I was studying Catholicism from the outside. Even when I was becoming convinced by parts of it, I could still tell myself I was only researching. Starting OCIA changed that.

I am not in OCIA because I think I already know everything or because every last question is gone. I started because I reached the point where staying outside and continuing to study forever did not make much sense. If I really believe Christ is present in the Eucharist, if I believe he established a visible Church, and if I think the historical evidence points toward the Catholic Church, then at some point I have to do something with that.

That does not mean shutting off questions. If anything, I want to use OCIA to ask better ones. I want to understand the Mass from the inside instead of only studying it as an argument. I want to understand confession as something I will actually participate in, not just something I can defend. I want to learn the liturgical year, prayer, the sacraments, and how Catholic life is supposed to shape an ordinary Christian day.

I also want the next part of this journey to be less about winning arguments. Apologetics has helped me because I needed reasons. But Christianity cannot just become a giant collection of arguments. If the Catholic Church is true, the point is not only that I can explain the Eucharist or answer an objection about Mary. The point is that I am supposed to become more faithful to Christ.

11. Where I Am Right Now

Right now, I would say I am pretty much on board with the real major dogmas of the Catholic Church. I believe the Trinity, the full divinity and humanity of Christ, his death and bodily resurrection, the inspiration of Scripture, and the need for grace and salvation through Christ. Those core Christian beliefs were never the part that made Catholicism difficult for me.

What has changed is the specifically Catholic part. I believe Jesus established a visible Church with real authority. I believe apostolic succession matters. I believe the sacraments are more than outward symbols. I believe Christ is really present in the Eucharist. I accept sacramental confession. I accept the Catholic understanding of the communion of saints and purgatory. I believe Peter had a unique role and that there is a real biblical and historical foundation for the papacy. I understand papal infallibility much differently than I did before and no longer see bad popes as a simple disproof of it.

And probably most surprising to me, I am basically on board with the Marian dogmas. Mother of God makes sense to me as a Christological teaching. I accept the perpetual virginity. I understand and accept the Immaculate Conception much better than I once did. I am willing to accept the Assumption based on the cumulative case and the authority of the Church, even though I still want to keep studying its early history. I also no longer think normal Catholic honor given to Mary is worship.

That is a pretty big change from where I started.

12. What I Still Want to Learn

I do not want this paper to end by acting like I have crossed every question off a list. There are still things I want to understand better during OCIA.

I want to keep digging into the exact development of papal authority in the first millennium. I want to understand the Assumption and the earliest Dormition traditions as carefully as I can. I want to study the Mass more deeply, especially how the Old Testament sacrifices, Passover, the Last Supper, and Revelation fit together. I want to understand indulgences better because that is

one of those subjects that can be explained badly very quickly. I also want to keep studying justification, grace, merit, and how Catholic language on salvation fits with Paul, because I think that is one of the biggest places Catholics and Protestants talk past each other.

More personally, I need to learn how to actually live Catholicism. I can research a doctrine for ten hours and still not know how to pray well. I can explain what confession is and still need to learn humility and repentance. I can defend the Real Presence and still need to understand what it means to approach the Eucharist with reverence. Those are probably the things OCIA needs to teach me that a research paper cannot.

13. Looking Back

Looking back, I do not think one argument made me Catholic. It was the accumulation of a lot of things that stopped being easy to explain away.

The authority question made me rethink how Christianity was supposed to work after the apostles. The canon made me realize I was already relying on the early Church more than I admitted. The Church Fathers showed me a Church with bishops, sacraments, apostolic succession, and a very strong belief in the Eucharist. John 6, the Last Supper, Paul, and the early Christians made the Real Presence harder for me to reduce to symbolism. Mary went from one of my biggest objections to an area I have spent enough time studying that I can now accept the major dogmas. Peter and the early role of Rome made the papacy much harder to dismiss. Even the bad parts of Church history forced me to understand more carefully what Catholics actually claim about infallibility.

I know there is still more to learn. There probably always will be. But I am not where I was two years ago. I am not mainly standing outside the Catholic Church trying to find the doctrine that proves it cannot be true.

I am in OCIA because, after everything I have looked at, I think there is a serious possibility that this really is the Church Christ established and has preserved through history. At this point the question for me is becoming less, "Can I find another objection?" and more, "If this is true, what am I supposed to do with it?"

For now, starting OCIA is my answer to that question.

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