

"Jason", my #1 son, did you know you were once the best known leader of the Argonauts who sought the Golden Fleece? Who were the Argonauts and what was the Golden Fleece?

## Who the Argonauts were

The **Argonauts** were a band of heroes in Greek myth that sailed with **Jason** on the ship *Argo* to retrieve the Golden Fleece. They are portrayed as an elite crew drawn from the greatest heroes of the age—skilled sailors, warriors, and adventurers—assembled specifically for this perilous quest. The story is one of the best-known Greek heroic cycles and survives in many versions, the most literary of which is the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes.

## The Golden Fleece: what it is and what it meant

The **Golden Fleece** is described as the fleece of a divine, golden-haired ram; in the most common telling it hung in Colchis (on the eastern edge of the Greek world) as a **guarded treasure**. In mythic terms **the fleece functions as a symbol of legitimate kingship, authority, and divine favor**—Jason's quest to seize it is both a heroic adventure and a political mission to reclaim his rightful throne.

Be that as it may. Generally speaking, I know what most of the popular religions in the world are really all about; which is why I do not embrace any particular theology personally; nor do I believe there is a "god" per se, Greek or otherwise.

Jason, you just informed me that you have decided to become a Catholic, like your wife has been most all her life. That is **your latest quest**, apparently. Prior to age 40 (~Aug/Sep 2018), you had rarely, if ever, been to church (so far as I know). More recently, once you met Molly and got married, it is no surprise that you began attending sometimes with her. And, you probably had to take some classes (part of your new quest), or something, before her priest would even perform the marriage at her church. So, fast forward. Now I need to play catch up ball, once again, and learn more about this religion that has **adopted you** and what you may or may not have been dealing with in order to become a new member of the church, etc.

The rest of this document will be **my quest**. **But** I am sharing with you, in this format, just so you know what I think about it thus far.

**Let's start with a high level outline of what this religion is about, when it was started, and what sets it apart from other possible religions or other branches of Christian thinking?**

## What Roman Catholicism is in a nutshell

Roman Catholicism is the largest branch of Christianity, centered on (1) belief in Jesus Christ, the authority of (2) Scripture and (3) Church tradition, and (4) a sacramental life **administered** (like a drug or a government) through a **hierarchical Church** led by the Pope in Rome at the top; the CEO. The Catholic Church sees itself as the continuation of the Christian community **founded by the 12+ apostles**, with a distinctive emphasis on **apostolic succession**, the **seven sacraments**, and the teaching authority (Magisterium) that interprets faith and morals. But that does not necessarily mean it is somehow the "best version" of Christianity any more than Sunni Islam is the best version of Islam. The Catholics do control a heck of a lot of money though.

## Origins and historical outline

- **Foundational claim** — Catholics (as would any Christian faith) trace the Church's origin to **Jesus and the apostles, especially to Peter**, whom they regard as the first bishop of Rome, in the **1st century**.
- **Early development** — Christianity (really **a break away branch of Judaism**) spread through the Roman Empire (**after Jesus died... much like how Muhammad broke away from Christianity, founded Islam, and later the Shia and Sunni factions evolved after he died**). Over centuries local churches organized into a structure, with bishops, and Rome acquired special status as a leading **diocese**.
- **Institutional formation** — Key moments shaping Catholic identity include the legalization of Christianity (by Constantine in the 4th century), ecumenical councils that defined doctrine, and medieval developments that centralized authority in the papacy.

## Core beliefs and practices (high level)

- **Trinity and Christology** — Belief in one God in three "Persons" or characteristics and in Jesus as fully God and fully human at the same time (somehow).
- **Scripture and Tradition** — Authority rests on both the Bible and the Church's living Tradition interpreted by the Magisterium (bishops in communion with the Pope).
- **Seven Sacraments** — Baptism, Eucharist (Communion), Confirmation, Reconciliation (Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony; sacraments are seen as outward signs that confer grace.
- **Liturgy and Mass** — The Eucharistic celebration (Mass) is central; Catholics believe that bread and wine become/represent the Body and Blood of Christ (doctrine of the Real Presence)... symbolically.

## What sets Catholicism apart from other Christian Branches?

Attribute	Catholic distinctive
Authority	Pope's primacy and a hierarchical Magisterium with binding teaching authority.
Sacramental system	Seven sacraments as channels of grace (more formalized than most Protestant traditions).
Role of Tradition	Tradition and Church teaching carry authority alongside Scripture (contrast with sola scriptura in many Protestant churches).
Worship style	Liturgical, often more formal and sacrament-centered than many Protestant services; Eastern Orthodoxy shares liturgical depth but differs on papal authority.

## Typical steps someone (an adult) usually takes to become Catholic

- **Inquiry and instruction** — Many parishes offer a program (often called **RCIA: Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults**) or shorter catechetical classes to teach Catholic beliefs, practices, and moral teaching.
- **Rites and sacraments of initiation** — Unbaptized adults normally receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist (often at Easter Vigil). Baptized Christians from other traditions may be received and confirmed depending on prior baptism.

- **Marriage in the Church** — For a Catholic wedding, the Church typically requires preparation (pre-marital counseling or classes) and that the marriage be celebrated according to canonical form unless a dispensation is granted. [That explains the classes and parish involvement you probably observed.](#)

## Practical things one may encounter as a new Catholic

- **Regular Mass attendance** (Sunday obligation and holy days).
- **Confession** — periodic sacrament of reconciliation; many Catholics go monthly or before major feasts.
- **Participation in parish life** — ministries, [volunteer opportunities](#), and parish-based [education](#) (\*[indoctrination or initiation](#) not unlike being initiated into any clan, a [fraternity or sorority](#), [the military](#), etc.).
- **Moral and social teaching** — guidance on ethical issues, social justice, and personal conduct (even including one's sex life) taught by the parish and diocese.

\*Just like the Freemasons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias grew, so did other fraternal organizations that popped up around the United States. There are the Order of Elks, the Loyal Order of Moose, the Fraternal Order of Eagles, the VA, etc. Joining a religious body is like joining any large group or government organization (like political parties and the military) **except** it is founded more on theology than on other social constructs. How well and how long a new member "fits in" will depend a lot on how much time and effort they put in to understand and master all the rules and practices that make up the organization's rituals and way of life.

## Common questions and tradeoffs you might consider

- **Is Catholicism “just another Christian denomination”?** It shares core Christian beliefs (Trinity, Christ’s divinity, resurrection) with other branches, but differs significantly in authority structures, sacramental theology, and the role of tradition.
- **How centralized is Catholic doctrine?** Quite centralized (like communism): papal teaching and ecumenical councils play a decisive role; this provides unity but can feel less flexible than other congregational models (more like socialism).
- **Cultural vs. theological practice** — Local parishes vary widely in style (traditional Latin Mass to contemporary liturgies), so lived experience depends a lot on the parish community.

### What is a [diocese](#)?

In church governance, a **diocese** is the ecclesiastical district (geographic area) under the jurisdiction of a bishop.

### What is the difference between a [bishop](#) and a [priest](#) in Catholic religion?

A **bishop** holds the *fullness of Holy Orders* and governs a [diocese](#), with authority to ordain priests and confirm; a **priest** is ordained to serve a [parish](#) or community, celebrate most sacraments, [and minister under a bishop](#).

## Roles and authority

- **Bishop** — Serves as the chief **pastor of a diocese** (a geographic local Church), is a **successor to the apostles**, and has teaching, sanctifying, and governing authority for that diocese. Bishops form a college under the Pope and are responsible for **oversight of priests, parishes, and diocesan institutions**. Similar to being in the cabinet of U.S. government.
- **Priest** — **Serves a parish or other community, leads worship (Mass), preaches, administers most sacraments (Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony when delegated), and provides pastoral care; priests normally operate under the authority and assignment of their diocesan bishop. More like a mayor of a city or town.**

## Ordination and sacramental powers

- **Holy Orders** have three ranks: **deacon, priest** (presbyter), and **bishop** (episcopate). A bishop receives the *fullness* of the sacrament of Holy Orders; only bishops can validly ordain (consecrate) other bishops and ordain priests.
- **Priests** receive sacramental authority to celebrate the Eucharist and other sacraments but normally cannot ordain or consecrate bishops; they exercise sacramental ministry by virtue of their ordination and by delegation from their bishop. They watch the flock.

That is basically who these "key members/leaders" of **the flock** are; without going into all sorts of other details on their rolls inside the church, etc.

## Quick comparison table

Role	Primary jurisdiction	Can ordain priests?	Typical daily focus
<b>Bishop</b>	Diocese	<b>Yes.</b> Consecrates priests and bishops.	Diocesan governance, confirmations, ordinations.
<b>Priest</b>	Parish or assigned ministry	<b>No</b> (except by delegation in rare canonical cases)	Celebrating Mass, confessions, pastoral care.

## Historical and theological basis

Catholic teaching links bishops to **apostolic succession**: bishops are seen as successors of the apostles who preserve teaching and sacramental ministry through an unbroken line of ordination. That theological claim underpins why episcopal ordination and jurisdiction are central to Catholic structure.

**Takeaway:** bishops exercise the Church's highest local sacramental and governing authority; priests are ordained ministers who serve communities under a bishop's oversight and who carry out most of the day-to-day sacramental and pastoral work.

Per Catholics, **was Jesus a Jew or not? And if Catholics trace the Church's origin to Jesus and the apostles in the 1st century, especially to Peter, whom they regard as the first bishop of Rome, who were these apostles and how did they factor into the early history of this religion?**

## Was Jesus Jewish?

**Yes.** Historically and in the New Testament accounts, **Jesus was born, lived, and taught as a Jew within first-century Judea**—observing Jewish customs, reading the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament (which came LONG before the **New Testament** which is the second division of the Christian biblical canon or Bible and which discusses the teachings and person of Jesus, as well as events relating to first-century Christianity), and participating in Jewish festivals.

## Who were the apostles and why they matter

- **The Twelve Apostles** were the core group of Jesus' closest followers whom he commissioned to preach and lead the early movement; their names include Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus (Jude), and **Judas Iscariot** (later replaced by Matthias) who was their treasurer **and the traitor**.
- **Function in the Apostolic Age:** after Jesus' death and reported resurrection, these apostles became the primary teachers, missionaries, and organizers who carried the message into Jewish and Gentile communities and helped form the earliest Christian congregations.

## Peter and the Roman connection

- **Peter's prominence:** Peter (Simon Peter) is repeatedly prominent in the Gospels and Acts and is traditionally regarded by Catholics as the chief among the apostles. "Peter, what happened to Paul?" asked Mary.
- **Peter and Rome:** Catholic tradition holds that Peter went to Rome, exercised leadership there, and was martyred under Nero (long-standing tradition says Peter was crucified after requesting to be crucified upside down out of humility); from this tradition the Church derives the idea of Rome's special role and Peter's primacy. Historical evidence for Peter's precise role in Rome is debated among scholars, but the tradition is central to Catholic claims about papal authority.

## Apostolic succession and how Catholics use it

- **Definition:** *Apostolic succession* is the claim that the Church's ministry and authority are passed down through an unbroken line of bishops from the apostles to the present.
- **Why it matters for Catholic identity:** Catholics see this succession as the means by which teaching, sacramental authority, and ecclesial unity are preserved; it underpins the Church's claims about valid ordination, sacramental efficacy, and institutional continuity with the apostolic era.

## How the apostles shaped early Christian history (quick timeline)

1. **During Jesus' ministry (c. 27–30 AD)** — apostles are chosen, trained, and sent out.
2. **After the crucifixion and resurrection** — apostles lead the Jerusalem community, preach to Jews and Gentiles, and begin forming local churches.
3. **Mid-1st century onward** — missionary activity (notably Paul's journeys), local leadership structures (elders/bishops) develop, and by the late 1st/2nd centuries the idea of episcopal succession and Rome's prominence become more articulated.

## Distinguishing history from theological claim

- **Historical core:** many scholars agree **Jesus and his earliest followers were Jewish** and that a distinct movement spread rapidly in the 1st century; documentary and archaeological evidence supports broad outlines but leaves details (e.g., exact roles in Rome) **open to interpretation**.
- **Theological claims:** doctrines like *papal primacy* and *apostolic succession* are theological interpretations of that history—accepted within Catholicism as authoritative, **debated or rejected by other Christian traditions**.

## Practical takeaway for conversation

- Joining the Catholic tradition is rooted directly in the Jewish Jesus and the apostolic community, with **continuity** emphasized through bishops and the papacy.
- What a parish emphasizes about the apostles or Peter, and what the sacraments mean to a member, like yourself, **will depend on your quest** going forward.

Something I would point out is that there were times when you were growing up that we had family and friends come for Easter, Thanksgiving or Christmas; something that probably won't be happening for Lois and me as much anymore; *for several reasons*. Sometimes I would simply ignore the fact that these should be religious holidays. Sometimes I actually spoke to everyone around the dinner table and perhaps quoted a thing or two from the Bible; just to let folks know what the holiday was really all about. And sometimes your mom and I would try to let you guys have fun during the holiday; like Christmas presents or the time we took you and Darryn to "Easter Island" and you hunted for eggs after the Easter Bunny invited you.

At Darryn's Birthday dinner you said you planned to be baptized just before Easter. And you invited us. We will not be coming. But, here is my take on Easter, based on a few facts.

## How the date of Easter is determined

Easter is celebrated on **the first Sunday after the Paschal Full Moon**, where the *Paschal Full Moon* is the Church's fixed (ecclesiastical) approximation of the first full moon on or after the **vernal** (spring) **equinox** (one of two moments in the year when the Sun is exactly above the Equator and day and night are apx equal length).

## Why that rule exists (brief history and rationale)

- Early Christians linked Jesus' death and resurrection to **Passover**, which is **set by the Jewish lunar calendar**; because Passover is tied to a full moon, early Christians used the moon to time Easter. [When he really died, just like when he was really born, and how his mother was a virgin, is anyone's guess.]
- To avoid regional differences and to ensure Christians everywhere celebrated on a Sunday, the Church (formalized at the Council of Nicaea, 325 AD) set a uniform rule: Easter = Sunday after the Paschal Full Moon following the (fixed) date of the spring equinox.

## Important technical details people often miss

- “Spring equinox” is fixed as March 21 in the Church’s rule, not the actual astronomical equinox which can vary by a day or two.
- The **Paschal Full Moon is an ecclesiastical calculation**, not necessarily the true astronomical full moon; it’s based on tables so the Church can set the date in advance. That means the Church’s “full moon” can differ from the real Full Moon by up to a couple of days.
- If the Paschal Full Moon falls on a Sunday, Easter is observed the *following* Sunday (so Easter never coincides with the Paschal Full Moon Sunday).

## Why Western and Eastern (Orthodox) Easter sometimes differ

- Western churches use the **Gregorian calendar** and its ecclesiastical full-moon tables; many Eastern Orthodox churches still use the **Julian calendar** (or Julian-based tables) for the equinox and Paschal moon, so their computed Paschal Full Moon can fall on a different date and thus their Easter often falls later.

## Practical consequences and a quick example

- Because of the rule, **Easter is a movable feast** that falls between late March and late April.
- Being baptized the day before Easter fits a long Christian practice: the **Easter Vigil** (the night before Easter Sunday) is a traditional time for baptisms and full reception into the Church, **symbolizing new life via the symbolic resurrection of the person baptized**.
- Thus, you being baptized this way is supposed to change your life forever, just like when Jesus supposedly was resurrected and how that changed everything according to Christian theology... while, in the meantime, the Romans battled to retain power in the Middle East and, later on, Islam came along and all the various factions fought back and forth for centuries to come.

Once someone has been Baptized, Confirmed, and has finished Eucharist, why would my son and his wife tell me and my wife that once he/they is/are part of the church he/they must make sure to attend Mass every Sunday from then on; or at least for several months after that?

## Core reason in one LONG sentence

Our daughter-in-law, who knows more about church rules, is probably telling our son he must attend **Mass every Sunday** because, in Catholic practice, Sunday Mass is both a **canonical obligation** and the primary way Catholics live out membership in the Church—receiving the Eucharist, being formed by the liturgy ("receiving the Eucharist" means **sharing in Christ’s real presence** through the consecrated bread and wine; "being formed by the liturgy" refers to the Church’s public worship, word, prayers and rites that shape a person’s beliefs, habits, and moral life), and becoming part of the parish community.

## Canonical and doctrinal basis

- **Sunday obligation (law)**. The **Code of Canon Law** (vs state law) states that “On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass.” This

is a formal duty for true Catholics unless a legitimate reason excuses them (illness, care of others, serious work, obligations, etc.).

- **Eucharist as central worship.** Catholic theology teaches that the **Eucharist (Mass)** is the *summit* of Christian life: it is how the Church celebrates Christ's Paschal Mystery and how the faithful receive spiritual nourishment. Regular Sunday participation is therefore seen as *essential* to spiritual life (even if that is really not true).

### **Pastoral and practical reasons our daughter-in-law likely had this in mind**

- **Habit and formation.** New Catholics are encouraged to build the weekly **habit** of worship so that faith becomes lived practice rather than occasional attendance; several months of **regular attendance helps that habit take root.**
- **Integration into parish life.** Regular Sunday presence helps our son meet parishioners, clergy, and ministries, which supports ongoing catechesis, friendships, and practical involvement.
- **Receiving Communion properly.** Catholics normally receive Communion at Mass; frequent Mass attendance helps ensure one is prepared (including the sacrament of Reconciliation when needed) and aware of the spiritual responsibilities tied to Communion.
- **Communion** unites the communicant more fully to Christ and to the whole Church; it is described as spiritual nourishment that strengthens charity and helps the believer live the Christian life.
- **The Eucharist** is believed to forgive venial sins and to give grace to resist sin and grow in holiness.

### **Typical exceptions and flexibility**

- **Legitimate excuses.** Canon law recognizes that attendance can be impossible or seriously difficult for reasons such as illness, caregiving, lack of a priest, or other grave causes; pastors can grant dispensations in particular cases.
- **Practical flexibility.** If work or **family obligations** make Sunday attendance hard, many parishes offer vigil Masses (Saturday evening) or multiple Sunday times; bishops' conferences can also transfer or suppress some holy days locally.

My son and I had planned a 10 day trip (during May 2026 including two Sundays) months ago, reserving motel rooms, planning activities, etc.; with a schedule that is nearly impossible to change, in order to adapt to this religious roadblock. What should **he** do now in order to continue on the trip and yet keep his wife and the church *satisfied*?

### **Short answer and principle**

Our son will soon be **bound by the Sunday Mass obligation**, but the Church recognizes **travel and other serious reasons** can make attendance difficult, if not impossible, and allows pastors (who rule over the flock) to grant dispensations or offer practical alternatives. It is their responsibility and no others' to figure out how to make things work.

## Practical options

1. **Look for a local Mass or Saturday vigil AND plan ahead.** Many parishes offer Saturday evening vigil Masses or multiple Sunday times; attending one of those usually fulfills the obligation.
2. **Ask the parish priest for a short, specific dispensation if needed.** A pastor can grant a dispensation for a just cause (diocesan rules vary), especially for travel that cannot be rescheduled. Contacting the pastor early is the normal route.
3. **Plan around Mass times where possible.** If the trip schedule is tight, see whether an early Sunday Mass or a Saturday vigil at a nearby parish fits the itinerary.
4. **If attendance is truly impossible, make a good-faith spiritual alternative.** When Mass is impossible for a grave reason, the faithful are encouraged to spend time in prayer, Scripture, and acts of charity as a spiritual consolation while seeking a dispensation if appropriate.

So much for leaping without looking or simply not thinking ahead to determine all the pros and cons of a given path in life. It is not uncommon for people to decide things that affect many others in the process, but they go ahead and jump right in anyway. They take on the responsibility of home ownership without solid income. They form partnerships with friends and family without knowing who is and is not reliable enough to hold up their end of the bargain. They adopt a pet without figuring out how to deal with what comes next. They get pregnant without knowing how to raise a child or if their sex partner will help raise the child properly. They join a club without figuring out what they will be asked to do as a result. They get hooked on drugs or drive while drunk without caring who might get hurt. All of these examples we have all had to think about. It is the game of LIFE; of pros and cons. Once children grow up it is their turn to leave the nest and to start using their head located on their own shoulders; IMHO. As a father or as someone's friend, if asked, I will give my best advice or help when I can; just as someone like Jesus probably gave his best advice and help to his apostles. But, at this point, all I can do is hope my sons listened to some of what I said while they were young and have learned to use their head enough to stay out of trouble while they are older. From there on it is survival of the fittest, from where I sit.

Given all that, here is a simple timeline (extra credit) covering Catholic history from the time Jesus died through the time the Romans ruled in the Middle East and when Islam became established and while the different factions fought for power, until the Roman Empire finally fell and most of the crusades happened; a clear, dated sequence of the major events and transitions from the death of Jesus through the Crusades, with brief context for each entry...

For most of its history the Roman world was dominated by **polytheistic, civic religion**: a system of public rites, temples, priesthoods, and festivals that tied worship to family, city, and state. Romans honored a large pantheon (Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, etc.), practiced ritual sacrifice and votive offerings, and **expected religion to maintain the "pax deorum"** — the “peace of the gods” that protected the community. Public religion was civic and practical rather than primarily doctrinal.

- **apx 30–33 CE — Death and resurrection of Jesus; apostolic mission.** Early followers (the Twelve Apostles and other disciples) form communities in Judea and beyond; Paul’s missions spread the new Christian movement into the Gentile world (a “**Gentile**” is

anyone who is **not Jewish...** while people like me and Lois are also “**Infidels**” or *unbelievers* or those who do not accept/embrace a particular faith, including Islam, et al).

- The Romans deal harshly (crucifixion for example) with other non-Roman religions.
- **apx 40s–100 CE — Apostolic age and early churches.** Local congregations develop leadership (elders/bishops), Christian writings circulate, and tensions over doctrine and Jewish/Gentile practice shape identity.
- **Early 4th century (c. 312–313) — Constantine and legalization of Christianity.** Constantine’s conversion and the Edict of Milan (313) end imperial persecution and open the way for imperial patronage of "the Church".
- **325 CE — First Council of Nicaea.** Convened to resolve major doctrinal disputes (notably Arianism); produced the original Nicene Creed and began the pattern of ecumenical councils shaping doctrine.
- **4th–5th centuries (gradual) — Transformation and fragmentation of Roman power; 476 CE often marked as the fall of the Western Roman Empire.** Political control in the West collapses into successor kingdoms while the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire endures.
- **4th–6th centuries — Christianization of the Roman Empire and institutional consolidation.** Bishops gain civic roles; theological councils and monasticism shape doctrine and practice across the Mediterranean.
- **7th century (610–750) — Rise and rapid expansion of Islam.** Muhammad’s prophetic career (beginning c. 610; Hijra 622) leads to the Rashidun and Umayyad expansions that quickly bring Syria, Palestine (name of a Roman region), Egypt, and North Africa under Muslim rule. **Note:** Between **610 and 750 CE** the territory many now call *Palestine* was a real, inhabited region under changing Roman administrations: it was part of Byzantine (Eastern Roman) Palestine until the Arab conquests of the 630s, and thereafter became a district of the early Islamic caliphates (commonly called **Jund Filastin** under the Umayyads). The **Philistines** (the Iron-Age people of Philistia who settled in today's Israel and often fought Israelites or Jews) had long ceased to exist as a distinct political group centuries earlier. However, the Romans later selected a similar name, *Palestine*, for this political district.
- **7th–11th centuries — Byzantine–Islamic frontier and shifting control of the Holy Land.** After the early Islamic conquests, control of the area today referred to as Israel, Palestine and Jerusalem alternates; Byzantium, various Muslim dynasties, and local powers contest the region for five centuries.
- **1054 CE — East–West Schism.** Long-standing theological, liturgical, and political differences culminate in mutual excommunications and a formal split between the Western (Roman Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) churches.
- **1095–1291 CE — The Crusades era (major expeditions).** Pope Urban II’s call (1095) launches the **First Crusade**; over the next two centuries multiple crusading campaigns, the establishment and fall of Crusader states, and intermittent **warfare reshape Christian–Muslim relations in the eastern Mediterranean.**

### Short explanations of the turning points and why they matter

- **From sect to empire religion (4th century):** Imperial acceptance under Constantine and subsequent emperors **transformed Christianity from a persecuted sect into a legally privileged, institutionally organized religion**; that shift created the structures (bishops, councils, state-church relations) that define much of later Catholic identity.

- **Fall of the Western Empire (5th century):** The collapse of centralized Roman authority in the West led to **regional kingdoms** where bishops and monasteries often became local stabilizing institutions—**shaping medieval Europe’s political and ecclesial map**.
- **Islamic expansion (7th century):** The rapid Arab conquests removed large Christian populations from Byzantine control and established new **Muslim polities** that governed the Holy Land and much of the Mediterranean for centuries; this geopolitical change is **central to later medieval conflicts** and the Crusades.
- **Schism and competing Christian centers (1054):** The split between Rome and Constantinople formalized divergent theological emphases and ecclesial authority structures, so **“Christianity” in the medieval world was not a single, unified institution**.
- **Crusades (11th–13th centuries):** A complex **mix of religious motive**, papal policy, political ambition, and economic interest **produced military campaigns** into the eastern Mediterranean; their consequences were long-lasting for Christian–Muslim relations, trade, and cultural exchange.

### A slightly deeper layer: competing narratives and scholarly cautions

- **Tradition vs. evidence:** Catholic tradition links Rome’s leadership to Peter and early apostolic activity in Rome; historians note early testimony and later ecclesiastical development but debate precise details and timing. The theological claim (apostolic succession) is central to Catholic identity even where historical reconstruction is uncertain.
- **“Fall” is a process, not a single day:** 476 CE is a useful marker for the end of imperial rule in the West, but the transformation of Roman institutions and society was gradual and regionally varied.
- **Crusades are multi-causal:** Religious rhetoric mattered, but so did politics, economics, and local dynamics; modern summaries risk oversimplifying motives or consequences.

### Takeaway

**Continuity and change:** Christianity begins within Judaism, becomes institutionalized under Roman patronage, then faces new geopolitical realities after the rise of Islam and the fragmentation of Roman power. The medieval period is shaped by competing Christian centers (Rome vs. Constantinople) and by intermittent warfare and diplomacy (including the Crusades) over the Holy Land. Religious turmoil continues to this very day. No one religion claims total control over all societies on the planet. While all this turmoil goes on in Middle Eastern history a lot more is going on in other continents (such as Asia, Africa, North and South America) and via other religious factions and doctrines.

What happens in most Christian religions throughout the year in terms of major events or rituals; list in order throughout the year and why these events take place, etc.?

Across most Christian traditions, the year follows a **liturgical calendar**—a cycle of seasons, feasts, and rituals that retell the story of Jesus and shape the spiritual life of the community. What follows is the major flow of the year, in order, with what happens and why it matters. This reflects the patterns shared by Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and many Protestant churches (with some variation).

## ✿ Advent — preparing for Christ’s coming

**When:** Late November to December 24 **What happens:**

- Lighting Advent candles
- Readings about hope, peace, joy, and love
- Themes of waiting and expectation

**Why:** Advent prepares believers for both **Christmas** and the idea of Christ’s eventual return. It’s a season of reflection and anticipation.

## 🎄 Christmas Season — celebrating Jesus’ birth

**When:** December 25 to early January (varies by tradition) **What happens:**

- Christmas services
- Nativity readings
- Feasts like Epiphany (visit of the Magi)

**Why:** Christians celebrate the belief that **God became human** in Jesus. It’s a season of joy, incarnation, and light.

## † □ Ordinary Time (Part 1) — Jesus’ early ministry

**When:** After Epiphany until Lent **What happens:**

- Readings about Jesus’ teachings and miracles
- Focus on discipleship and daily Christian life

**Why:** This period explores how Jesus lived and taught, grounding faith in everyday practice.

## ✿ Lent — repentance and preparation

**When:** 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays) **What happens:**

- Ash Wednesday (ashes placed on the forehead)
- Fasting, prayer, and acts of charity
- Reflection on human frailty and need for grace

**Why:** Lent mirrors Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness and prepares believers for the events of Holy Week and Easter.

## 🕯 Holy Week — the final days of Jesus’ life

**When:** The week before Easter **Major days:**

- **Palm Sunday** — Jesus enters Jerusalem
- **Maundy Thursday** — Last Supper and foot washing

- **Good Friday** — Crucifixion
- **Holy Saturday** — Waiting and silence

**Why:** Holy Week reenacts the central drama of the Christian story: sacrifice, suffering, and love.

### **Easter — resurrection and new life**

**When:** Easter Sunday and the 50 days after **What happens:**

- Celebration of Jesus’ resurrection
- Baptisms often take place
- Joyful worship and renewal themes

**Why:** Easter is the **core** of Christian faith: the belief that Jesus rose from the dead, defeating sin and death.

### **Pentecost — the birth of the Church**

**When:** 50 days after Easter **What happens:**

- Readings about the Holy Spirit descending on the disciples
- Red vestments symbolizing fire
- Confirmations often occur

**Why:** Pentecost marks the moment the disciples were empowered to spread the message of Jesus. It’s seen as the Church’s “birthday.”

### **Ordinary Time (Part 2) — living out the faith**

**When:** After Pentecost until Advent **What happens:**

- Teachings on Christian living
- Parables, miracles, and ethical teachings
- Growth, mission, and community life

**Why:** This long season focuses on **spiritual growth** and applying Jesus’ teachings to everyday life.

### **Additional major feasts (vary by tradition)**

- **Trinity Sunday** — celebrating the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **All Saints’ Day (Nov 1)** — honoring all saints and faithful departed
- **Feast of Christ the King** — ending the liturgical year with the theme of Christ’s reign

These feasts highlight key theological themes and connect believers to the wider Christian story.

## Sacraments and rituals that occur throughout the year

These don't belong to a specific season but are woven into the life of the church:

- **Baptism** — initiation into the Christian community
- **Confirmation** — strengthening by the Holy Spirit
- **Eucharist/Communion** — weekly or regular participation in Christ's presence
- **Marriage** — covenant between spouses
- **Funerals** — commending the deceased to God
- **Reconciliation/Confession** — forgiveness and healing
- **Ordination** — setting apart ministers

Their timing depends on the community and the individuals involved.

## How the whole year fits together

The Christian year is designed to:

- Retell the **life of Jesus**
- Shape believers' spiritual rhythms
- Create a shared story and identity
- Mark time with meaning rather than just dates

It's a cycle of **anticipation** → **celebration** → **reflection** → **growth**, repeating every year.

## What about Thanksgiving Day?

Thanksgiving Day is **not** part of the traditional Christian liturgical calendar, but in North America it has become a day that many Christian communities mark with worship, prayers, and themes that connect naturally to the faith. It sits *alongside* the Christian year rather than *inside* it.

## What Thanksgiving Day is

Thanksgiving in Canada (second Monday in October) and the U.S. (fourth Thursday in November) is a **civil holiday**, not a religious feast. Its roots are in:

- Harvest celebrations
- Gratitude for provision and survival
- Community gatherings
- National history and identity

Because gratitude is a major theme in Christianity, churches often incorporate Thanksgiving into their worship life even though it's not a formal Christian holy day.

## How Christian communities observe Thanksgiving

Most churches treat Thanksgiving as a **special worship occasion**, not a sacrament or required observance. Common practices include:

- **Thanksgiving services** with prayers of gratitude
- **Scripture readings** about thankfulness, harvest, and God’s provision
- **Hymns** focused on creation, blessing, and abundance
- **Food drives** or charitable giving
- **Community meals** or potlucks

These practices connect the holiday to Christian values without making it part of the liturgical cycle.

### Why Thanksgiving resonates with Christian themes

Even though it’s secular, Thanksgiving aligns with several core Christian ideas:

- **Gratitude** — a central posture in Christian spirituality
- **Stewardship** — caring for creation and sharing resources
- **Community** — gathering with others in fellowship
- **Blessing** — recognizing life as a gift
- **Justice and generosity** — supporting those in need

Many churches use the day to reflect on these themes and encourage acts of compassion.

### How Thanksgiving fits into the Christian year

Thanksgiving simply falls **during Ordinary Time** (a period between Pentecost and Advent). Churches may decorate with autumn colors or harvest symbols, but the next major Christian season after Thanksgiving is **Advent**, which begins in late November or early December.

### And last but not least – Most worldwide religious categories (with non-religion included)

Rank	Group	Approx. adherents	Apx Share of population
1	<b>All of Christianity</b> There may be 20–40% of apx 1.4 billion Catholics or apx 280–560 million practicing (weekly-attending) Catholics worldwide	~2.3 billion	~29%
2	<b>All Islam including Sunni, Shia, etc.</b>	~1.9 billion	~24%
3	<b>Unaffiliated – Non-religious</b> (non-religious people like Chuck & Lois)	~1.2 billion	~16%
4	<b>Hinduism</b>	~1.2 billion	~15%
5	<b>Buddhism</b>	~500 million	~7%
6	Folk and traditional religions such as Aboriginal, Yoruba, Akan, Zulu, native American, ancestor worship, Taoism, Kaharingan, Sunda Wiwitan, Hoodoo, Animism, etc.	~400–600 million	~7%
7	Other world religions <b>(Sikhism, Judaism, Bahá’í, Jainism, etc.)</b>	Several million combined	~1% (combined)
8	All remaining small or local faiths Witchcraft, Voodoo, Satanism, etc.	Several million combined	~1% (combined)