

Dear Protestant Friend,

First of all I agree with you. The truth has been set, and how we live, must follow that. G.K. Chesterton wrote, “the purpose of an open mind, like that of an open mouth, is to close it on something solid.” For the mind that ‘something solid’ is truth. Once truth is discovered it would be foolish to not act on it. Ultimately that is the nutshell of my story. My decision to become Catholic was one of endless hours of research, reading and prayer. It began around 5 years ago and culminated in my conversion to Catholicism during Easter of 2003. I can’t begin to explain how secure it feels to be in the historical Christian Church that has continued to grow from the apostles and the early Church. As [Stephen Ray](#), a Baptist minister who converted to the Faith wrote in his book, ‘Crossing the Tiber’...”we stand shoulder to shoulder in historical, liturgical and theological continuity with the apostles, the martyrs, the saints, the Early Church Fathers, and the billions of common folk who have entered and loved the Catholic Church for twenty centuries.” Bill, I finally feel at home and please understand that I am not one of those persons that you mentioned, who does not know why I believe what I do.

As you know, I have journeyed from Pentecostalism, and then was exposed to multiple protestant traditions while teaching at the Stouffville Christian Interdenominational School, in Ontario. Then I attended the Baptist Church and finally arrived ‘home’ in the Catholic Faith. Being exposed to numerous expressions of Protestantism started my quest for ‘truth’. I began to ask myself, where does the ultimate truth come from. Finally it was an issue of authority and which Church honestly had it. I began to seek knowledge from early church history, which ultimately led me to study Catholicism. As John Henry Newman, a brilliant mind of the 19th Century and an Anglican minister who converted to the Catholic Faith wrote, “to study history is to cease to be Protestant.” Bill, that was true for me. I began to read writings of the first Christian Bishops, the Early Fathers of the Church, along with how they interpreted scripture and I quickly observed that their teachings carried the same markings as the Catholic Church.

Originally, I fought these urges, discussing them with other Christians including Protestants and Catholics. I grew up to believe that Catholics were lost and that they did not have truth, but that was not the truth, Bill. I believed things that anti-Catholics had written or said, but I never looked at the source itself to understand what the Catholic Church said about herself. I remember studying the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, who was the third Bishop of Antioch, who had sat under the teachings of the beloved disciple, John, and was martyred in 110 A.D. He was writing on the groups that had left orthodox teaching on the Eucharist and I quote him, “they abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” This journey into early Christian thought led me to read more and more of the earliest Christian writers and it was obvious, that they were Catholic. I kept asking myself, ‘who was closer to the truth? I mean the gospel that Jesus and His apostles taught? The Reformers of the 16th century or the Early Church Fathers of the faith, who sat at the very feet of the apostles?’ For me the necessary action on this truth became obvious. I have consumed book after book, article after article, conversed on line with other seekers of truth, and I stand convinced that the fullness of truth is found in the bosom of the Catholic Church. I knew that if the Catholic Church is the Church that began with the Apostles, then I wanted, no I needed, to be aligned to Her.

Obviously, what has taken me 5 years to work through can't be adequately represented in a brief letter, but I hope that I can convey to you some things about my journey. I appreciate your interest and your non-confrontational approach when you said that you simply wanted to know my reasons, not to condemn or judge. I believe you, and because of that I am happy to share my faith journey with you. I also understand that on some points you may disagree, and I respect that and we may have to agree to disagree on some things. Throughout my letter I will list for you some of the books that I have read and also some apologetic websites that have helped me immensely. Now, let me address some of the points you have asked about.

TRADITION...you mentioned that Catholics you know have not grasped the life-changing message of the gospel. I understand your thoughts here, but we also have known Protestants who have not grasped the life-changing message. I am sure that you do not feel that this nullifies Protestant doctrine and I believe this does not make the message that the Catholic Church has been proclaiming for 2000 years, untruth. Unfortunately, we live in a culture of new age thought and liberalism. Some of this has influenced many Catholic and Protestant men and women. Alan Schreck, a Catholic author, writes in 'Catholic and Christian', "Catholics sometimes assume that persons who are baptized, attend Mass, and receive the sacraments regularly have obviously accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives.

Pastoral experience with U.S. Catholics shows that this is often not the case; many Catholics have not yet made a deliberate, adult decision to believe in Jesus Christ and give their lives fully to him. In response to this, the Catholic Church has placed a strong emphasis in recent years on evangelization (even of the baptized), on continual conversion to Christ, and on spiritual renewal." In my own experience Bill, Christ has dramatically renewed my walk as a Christian since becoming Catholic, and I know many others as well who feel the same way, so it is important to remember that many Catholics are living lives that have been changed by the message of the Church.

Now, to address your comments about tradition. Are you of the mindset that Christ never founded a Church, or that He founded such a loose fraternity of friends that they kind of had to make up the rules as they went along? My study of history has shown me that this isn't what happened at all. Did you know that they already had Bishops and a priesthood by 110 A.D.? That's only 15 years after the death of the Apostle John. There had also already been four Popes, before the ink was dry on the Book of Revelation. I was honestly taken back by all this new knowledge.

The truth is that Pope Clement, who was the fourth Pope, wrote a letter to the Corinthians that showed that the Church had accepted his authority over them, in about 80-90 A.D.!!! Many years before John wrote his Apocalypse! Here is a portion of his letter: 'you are versed, and indeed you are well versed, beloved in the Sacred Scriptures; and you have studied the Oracles of God. You therefore, who laid the foundation of the rebellion, submit to the presbyters and be chastened to repentance, bending your knees in a spirit of humility. Accept our counsel, and you will have nothing to regret.' This portion alone shows that Pope Clement of Rome writes to the Corinthians advising these 'rebellious' men to repent. I believe that Martin Luther may have done well to follow this strong advise from Clement. Luther's actions have resulted in approximately 33,000 different Protestant Denominations, worldwide.

When you mention Mark 7, let me address the last part of your statement first... 'adding tradition to God's Word'. First of all, Bill, saying 'God's Word' is not the same as saying 'Scripture'. Think about it for a minute – when Jesus said, “don't add to God's Word”, none of the New Testament had even been written down yet. So, if He had meant, do not add anything to Scripture, then that means that we shouldn't be using the New Testament! Do you think He could have meant that? Of course not! Rather, the 'Word of God' is everything that comes from God, including the written Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and also everything else that He taught the early followers, such as Baptism, the Mass, the ordination of Bishops and priests, and other unwritten Traditions, that were being used very early in the Church according to early church history shown in the writings of the Early Church Fathers. (Pick yourself up a copy of 'The Faith of the Early Fathers' by William Jurgens, a collection of the writings of the Early Church Bishops/Deacons and theologians) Remember it took a long time for all the New Testament to be written down. Most of the traditions you may be objecting to, such as the Priesthood and the Mass, were already well established before the ink was even dry on most of the New Testament!

You stated that you read that in 1545 the Council of Trent declared that tradition was 'now' equal in authority with the Bible. Here is exactly what was stated by Trent:

DECREE CONCERNING THE CANONICAL SCRIPTURES

The sacred and holy, ecumenical, and general Synod of Trent,--lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the Same three legates of the Apostolic Sec presiding therein,--keeping this always in view, that, errors being removed, the purity itself of the Gospel be preserved in the Church; which (Gospel), before promised through the prophets in the holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, first promulgated with His own mouth, and then commanded to be preached by His Apostles to every creature, as the fountain of all, both saving truth, and moral discipline; and seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand; (the Synod) following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety, and reverence, all the books both of the Old and of the New Testament--seeing that one God is the author of both --as also the said traditions, as well those appertaining to faith as to morals, as having been dictated, either by Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession. And it has thought it meet that a list of the sacred books be inserted in this decree, lest a doubt may arise in any one's mind, which are the books that are received by this Synod. They are as set down here below: of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, to wit, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Josue, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first book of Esdras, and the second which is entitled Nehemias; Tobias, Judith, Esther, Job, the Davidical Psalter, consisting of a hundred and fifty psalms; the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaias, Jeremias, with Baruch; Ezechiel, Daniel; the twelve minor prophets, to wit, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggaeus, Zacharias, Malachias; two books of the Machabees, the first and the second. Of the New Testament: the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke the

Evangelist; fourteen epistles of Paul the apostle, (one) to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, (one) to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, (one) to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two of Peter the apostle, three of John the apostle, one of the apostle James, one of Jude the apostle, and the Apocalypse of John the apostle.

Bill, as you can see, we believe that the written word comes down through Tradition as Christ originally left the full deposit of Christian faith with his apostles who handed them on to the Bishops of the day and on and on it has gone. The Council simply stated what it always believed. It did not just say...oh by the way as of right now we declare that tradition is equal to scripture! The Catechism of the Catholic Church (you should get yourself a copy of it, if you wish to sincerely study what the Catholic Church holds as it's statement of Faith) states: (you need to see all of this)

The Apostolic Tradition

75 "Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up, commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel, they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline."

In the apostolic preaching . . .

76 In keeping with the Lord's command, the Gospel was handed on in two ways:

—Orally "by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received—whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit";

—in writing "by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing."

. . . continued in apostolic succession

77 "In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them 'their own position of teaching authority.'” Indeed, "the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time."

78 This living transmission, accomplished in the Holy Spirit, is called Tradition, since it is distinct from Sacred Scripture, though closely connected to it. Through Tradition, "the Church, in her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes." "The sayings of the holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer."

79 The Father's self-communication made through his Word in the Holy Spirit, remains present and active in the Church: "God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the Spouse of

his beloved Son. And the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the Church—and through her in the world—leads believers to the full truth, and makes the Word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness."

II.

The Relationship Between Tradition and Sacred Scripture

One common source . . .

80 "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal." Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own "always, to the close of the age."

. . . two distinct modes of transmission

81 "Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit." "And [Holy] Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching."

82 As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."

Apostolic Tradition and ecclesial traditions

83 The Tradition here in question comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit. The first generation of Christians did not yet have a written New Testament, and the New Testament itself demonstrates the process of living Tradition.

Tradition is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical, or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time. These are the particular forms, adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church's magisterium.

So Bill, when you look at it this way you can have a fuller understanding of just why the Church has such a high reverence for The Whole deposit of Christian Faith. The doctrine of Sola Scriptura (Bible Only) is not sound intellectually or Biblically. It is not taught in Scripture itself, nor is it even implied. As a protestant I believed the Bible was the 'bulwark' of my faith. I sang "The Word of God, we stand upon the Word of God", and of course I still do, but not on written Scripture only, but on all that Jesus left with the Apostles and passed on to His Church. Remember as I mentioned earlier that the phrase the "Word of God" does not always mean

‘written Scripture’. As a matter of fact nine times out of ten it refers to the ‘spoken’ or oral tradition. For example, in I Thess. 2:13, Paul wrote, ‘And for this reason we too give thanks to God unceasingly, that, in receiving the word of God from hearing us, you received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe.’

The Church throughout the centuries has preserved tradition. For an excellent study on Tradition see the article posted here, <http://www.mark-shea.com/6.html>.

Consider an example of just how some things were passed on by the Apostles in the first century of the Church. In Acts 20:35 Paul was speaking to the Ephesian Elders and he told them to keep in mind what the Lord Jesus said, ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive.’ Now, if Paul never mentioned this, would this statement of Jesus ever have come to us? If you look all throughout the gospels, you will find it is nowhere recorded. So the only way this would have been given to us would have been by the Tradition of the Church, and as such that is how it was given, as the written Scriptures have flowed from the full deposit of Faith. From this we have to realize that Jesus was with the Apostles for a long time and not everything he taught us was written into Scripture. You see Bill, the Bible is not the Bulwark of our Faith, but the Church, that Christ left, is. How do I know this? In I Timothy 3:15 Paul wrote, “But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead this Church into all truth in John 14:26, and He has done that for 2000 years.

Bill, logically, one cannot believe that Jesus allowed the Church to wander in total error for the first 1500 years of Christianity. If He did, he was not a very good teacher, or the Apostles were not very good at passing on the faith. The Church is the PILLAR and FOUNDATION of truth. If you believe scripture you must see that it states that the Church left by Christ is our Bulwark. There was only one Church, Bill, until She was divided by the Protestant Reformation, which, as mentioned above, has led to approximately 33,000 different splits ever since. Is this the will of God? I think not! Jesus prayed ‘Father, that they may be one, as we are one’.

To conclude this point, the Holy Spirit waited for almost 4 centuries before finally collecting and forming the apostolic writings into a collection called the New Testament. Why didn’t the apostles collect them as soon as possible and make them the sole rule of Christian Faith? It is because the TRUTH was not exclusively placed into a book, but the fullness of faith was deposited to the Church. The Church is the custodian and defender of the faith. The apostles left not only their writings but also their oral traditions and practices. In II Thess. 2:15 it says, “Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught, either by an oral statement or by a letter of ours. “So with this understanding the story of Mark 7 and Matt. 15 helps us see that Jesus did not condemn the tradition from God, but from man. The truths of the Church are from God, given by Jesus to the Apostles and propagated by the Church throughout the ages.

Also, II Tim. 2:2 - And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well.

I Cor. 15:3-11 - For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the

third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Kephas, then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God (that is) with me. Therefore, whether it be I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

And again, I Thess. 3:6 - We instruct you, brothers, in the name of (our) Lord Jesus Christ, to shun any brother who conducts himself in a disorderly way and not according to the tradition they received from us.

See others as well, I Cor. 11:2, 1 Peter 1:25.

If you are interested in an Early Church Father, consider, ORIGEN, who was born in 185 A.D and died in 254. He was a disciple of St. Polycarp, who in turn was a hearer of John the Apostle. He wrote: 'although there are many who believe that they themselves hold to the teachings of Christ, there are yet some among them who think differently from their predecessors. The teaching of the Church has indeed been handed down through an order of succession from the Apostles, and remains in the Churches even to the present time. That alone is to be believed as the truth which is in no way at variance with ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition.'

Please visit the website I gave you above to see how even what you believe as the TRINITY came down through the tradition of the Catholic Church. It was stated and made clear in response over a long period of time to the arguments of Arianism, which kept pushing that Jesus was not equal to God the Father. We have this truth because of the teaching of the Catholic Bishops, who defended the divinity of Christ and used Sacred Scripture to support what they already knew.

PURGATORY – I thought it ironic that you quoted C.S. Lewis early on in your letter to me, for as you know, he was very scholarly and he was High Anglican and actually held to a gospel that was much closer to Catholicism than that of Evangelical or Fundamentalist teachings. I believe that whomever you spoke to about Purgatory honestly may not have been able to give you what you were seeking, but that does not mean that it does not exist. You wanted Scholars/theologians? How about C.S. Lewis. He stated: "Our souls demand Purgatory, don't they?" He himself believed in Purgatory. Here is his statement from 'Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer', pages 107-109:

"Of course I pray for the dead. At our age the majority of those we love best are dead. What sort of intercourse with God could I have if what I love best were unmentionable to Him? I believe in purgatory. Our souls demand purgatory, don't they? My favourite image on this matter comes from the dentist's chair. I hope that when the tooth of life is drawn, a voice will say, 'Rinse your mouth out with this.' This will be purgatory.' "

Purgatory as taught by the Church is:

III. The Final Purification, or Purgatory

1030 All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

1031 The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned. The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offences can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.

1032 This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." From the beginning the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God.

Also:

The punishments of sin

1472 To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a double consequence. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.

1473 The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man."

Now that you have read the official teaching of the Church, I will try to explain it. Catholics believe, 'the smallest drop of Christ's blood is sufficient to obtain salvation for all the sins of all the people who ever have lived, lived now, or will live in the future.' (Quote from Bible Basics: An Introductory Study Guide to the Catholic Faith by Steve Kellmeyer)

First of all, Purgatory is not a second chance gospel. Those souls in purgatory (state not place) are saved and are being cleansed to finally see the vision of God. All who are there will go to Heaven. I like how Stephen Ray explains it on his website, he writes: 'In my younger days, I once hitchhiked around Europe for a week, leaving my wife and family in our chalet in Switzerland. To save money and time, I slept on trains, didn't take showers, etc. When I returned a week later, unshaved, grizzily, and dirty, my wife refused to let me in the chalet. Now wait a minute: I was her husband, I was part of the family, I belonged in that house! Yet, I was not clean or "holy" enough to enter. It is the same for heaven. So my wife made me undress and take a sponge bath on the porch before I could step in the door. I was part of the family but I had to have a final cleaning up before I was allowed into the full joy of the home. Jesus told His disciples that "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean" (Jn 13:10). Purgatory is simply the final stage of sanctification.' You can view the full article here at: <http://www.catholic-convert.com/Portals/57ad7180-c5e7-49f5-b282-c6475cdb7ee7/Documents/Purgatory.doc>.

Sin carries two consequences: separation from God and an attachment to it's pleasure. Of course Christ's atonement can bring us back into communion with God, but the effects of sin, what the Church calls, 'temporal punishment' as a result of sin stays with us for a time. So purgatory is simply a final sanctification that occurs to the repentant person. You believe as do I in the process of becoming Holy, being sanctified. The Catholic Church does as well, with our sanctification climaxing after our death, through purgatory, our final cleansing. You must remember that this period cannot be understood in our language of 'time'. It is outside time. It is a state, and it may occur instantaneously in our timeframe. You yourself believe that when you die, you may die, while being attached to some sin, but at the moment of death that this sin will not be attached to you when you enter heaven. This timeframe then is purgatory, the removal of this sin making us completely holy before an All Holy God. In Rev. 21:27, Scripture explains that, 'nothing unclean shall enter heaven.' This then is the final sanctification for a Christian. Catholics believe that although Scripture does not say 'purgatory', which is also the case for the words Trinity, and Incarnation, that it is taught in these passages. Heb. 9:27 – 'and just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgement...' Matt. 12:32 – 'and whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Jesus implies here that some sort of post-death forgiveness can occur for some sins, because He takes care to point out it won't happen for the sin of speaking against the Holy Spirit.)

You may be asking, how can you die in God's grace and friendship and yet be imperfectly purified? The same way we can live in God's grace and friendship, yet be imperfectly purified. Many people go to their graves struggling with sin, and purgatory is the final stage when we know that our struggling will not be in vain.

You seem to believe that purgatory was an invention of the Church to gain wealth. Actually Bill, the concept of purgatory existed before Jesus was born. I know that you do not accept 2 Maccabees as a part of God's Written Word, but at least you will be able to acknowledge that praying for the dead was a normal event in the life of the Jewish people about 150 years before Christ was born. Here is the story, In 2 Maccabees chapter 12.

40 “But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had been slain.

41 They all therefore praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden.

42 Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas warned the soldiers to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen.

43 He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view;

44 for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death.

45 But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought.

46 Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.”

So as you can see, this belief in praying for the dead existed with the Jews long before Christ and the Apostles. It is also evident from Early Church writings that the early Christians continued the practice of praying for the dead. Early writings on Catacomb walls include ‘a prayer here and there for the dead: ‘May God refresh thy Spirit’, as acknowledged by one of the most well know anti-Catholic writers, Alexander Hislop in his book, *The Two Babylons*. Also of interest is II Tim 1:16-18. Paul here prays for a dead man, after giving him a eulogy, his friend Onesiphorus: ‘May the Lord grant mercy to the family of Onesiphorus because he often gave me a new heart and was not ashamed of my chains. But when he came to Rome, he promptly searched for me and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. And you know very well the services he rendered in Ephesus.’

Another text also shows that early Christians were even having themselves baptized for the dead. I Cor. 15:29 - Otherwise, what will people accomplish by having themselves baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, then why are they having themselves baptized for them?

Your point on the Church’s wealth was undoubtedly brought up to claim that prayers said for the dead brought the Church Her wealth. This is just not true, and would take up another discussion on indulgences, but suffice it to note that there was a period of several hundred years when the Church accepted monetary gifts and granted a lessening of punishment for sins, but this practice was stopped due to the stumbling block that it created. However we still do pray for the dead, as the example of scripture and Church History has shown. Also a person’s soul is prayed for in Church without the requirement of money, but a family usually gives the priest a stipend of

approximately \$5.00 as a measure of thanks and is based upon Paul's endorsement to pay the labourer what he is worth. Hardly enough to create the Church's wealth. Instead think of just how long this organism has been here.... 2000 years. Imagine if we lived that long, our net worth would be very high. This is not a negative. The Church has had many amazing paintings, structures, statues, etc that are now worthless in price given to her over the centuries. As for your statement that it is wrong for the Church to have these buildings, this is a weak argument, since many mega-protestant churches exist all over the world including some of the poorest nations of South America. People do give out of love for the work of God in both Protestant and Catholic circles, and remember it is not the Pope who builds all these churches you mention, but it is the people, even out of poverty who give to glorify God...anyhow this is another discussion.

For more info on Purgatory check out these sites:

<http://www.catholicsource.net/articles/purgatory.htm>

<http://www.catholic-convert.com/Portals/57ad7180-c5e7-49f5-b282-c6475cdb7ee7/Documents/Purgatory.doc>

<http://catholicoutlook.com/objpurg.html>. ...This one is very good.

As for your comment about salvation and suffering, yes Catholics believe that suffering does in some mystical way work along with the suffering of Christ and that it has a salvific aspect. You see, Christ paid for our sins, but Scripture does speak about what is gained through our suffering. When we offer up our suffering for others or ourselves it compliments the work of Christ. Not that it is necessary for our salvation, but Christ accepts it as our gift to him.

Consider I Peter chapter 1:6-9: In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now yet believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of (your) faith, the salvation of your souls."

And even stronger is Paul's statement in Colossians. Paul talks about "filling up in his flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's sufferings for the sake of his body, which is the Church" (Colossians 1:24). Does Paul mean that Jesus' cross is insufficient to save us? Of course not. He means that his sufferings are to be joined to Christ's and offered for the sake of his Body. In short, he is talking about being crucified with Christ and (like Christ) for the love of his people. Catholics see suffering, not as something we do to be "good enough for God", but rather as God's strangest gift to us. And we do so because, like the Apostles who counted themselves fortunate to be worthy of suffering for the Name (Acts 5:41), we agree with Scripture that it is an undeserved honour (and one we could never earn) to "be found worthy of suffering for the Name" (if our little acts of charity and abstinence can even be compared with his complete act of self-denial which made us "good enough" for God 2,000 years ago). Taken from - <http://www.mark-shea.com/gift.html>.

So, yes, for us suffering has meaning.

SALVATION FOUND IN THE CHURCH ... This teaching may disturb you Bill, but maybe you misunderstand. First of all, would it be so difficult to accept if you believed that the Catholic Church Is the Body of Christ? And if you believed this, wouldn't it make sense then to say that a person cannot be saved without the Church? The doctrine of which you speak is found in the Catechism, paragraph 780: 'The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and men.' Many people misunderstand this doctrine, which was, by the way, believed by the Church Fathers...the belief that it is normally necessary to be Catholic to be saved. Paragraph 846 of the Catechism states: "How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church, which is his Body: Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church, which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it."

There are exceptions, and it is possible for people to be saved who have not been fully initiated into the Catholic Church. Again paragraph 847 confirms this: "This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation."

The early Church Fathers taught that salvation was possible to some outside the Catholic Church, but for those who knowingly and deliberately committed the sin of heresy (rejecting the divinely revealed doctrines) or schism (separating from the Catholic Church), no salvation would be possible until they repented and returned to live in Catholic Unity. Consider some of the early church fathers:

http://www.catholic.com/library/Salvation_Outside_the_Church.asp

Ignatius of Antioch

"Be not deceived, my brethren: If anyone follows a maker of schism [i.e., is a schismatic], he does not inherit the kingdom of God; if anyone walks in strange doctrine [i.e., is a heretic], he has no part in the passion [of Christ]. Take care, then, to use one Eucharist, so that whatever you do, you do according to God: For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup in the union of his blood; one altar, as there is one bishop, with the presbytery and my fellow servants, the deacons" (Letter to the Philadelphians 3:3–4:1 [A.D. 110]).

Justin Martyr

"We have been taught that Christ is the first-begotten of God, and we have declared him to be the Logos of which all mankind partakes [John 1:9]. Those, therefore, who lived according to reason [Greek, logos] were really Christians, even though they were thought to be atheists, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them . . . Those who lived before Christ but did not live according to reason [logos] were wicked men, and enemies of Christ, and murderers of those who did live according to reason [logos], whereas those who lived then or who live now according to reason [logos] are Christians. Such as these can be confident and unafraid" (First Apology 46 [A.D. 151]).

Irenaeus

"In the Church God has placed apostles, prophets, teachers, and every other working of the Spirit, of whom none of those are sharers who do not conform to the Church, but who defraud themselves of life by an evil mind and even worse way of acting. Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and all grace" (Against Heresies 3:24:1 [A.D. 189]).

"[The spiritual man] shall also judge those who give rise to schisms, who are destitute of the love of God, and who look to their own special advantage rather than to the unity of the Church; and who for trifling reasons, or any kind of reason which occurs to them, cut in pieces and divide the great and glorious body of Christ, and so far as in them lies, destroy it—men who prate of peace while they give rise to war, and do in truth strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel. For they can bring about no 'reformation' of enough importance to compensate for the evil arising from their schism . . . True knowledge is that which consists in the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place [i.e., the Catholic Church]" (ibid., 4:33:7–8).

Clement of Alexandria

"Before the coming of the Lord, philosophy was necessary for justification to the Greeks; now it is useful for piety . . . for it brought the Greeks to Christ as the law did the Hebrews" (Miscellanies 1:5 [A.D. 208]).

Origen

"[T]here was never a time when God did not want men to be just; he was always concerned about that. Indeed, he always provided beings endowed with reason with occasions for practicing virtue and doing what is right. In every generation the wisdom of God descended into those souls which he found holy and made them to be prophets and friends of God" (Against Celsus 4:7 [A.D. 248]).

"If someone from this people wants to be saved, let him come into this house so that he may be able to attain his salvation . . . Let no one, then, be persuaded otherwise, nor let anyone deceive himself: Outside of this house, that is, outside of the Church, no one is saved; for, if anyone should go out of it, he is guilty of his own death" (Homilies on Joshua 3:5 [A.D. 250]).

Cyprian of Carthage

"Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress [a schismatic church] is separated from the promises of the Church, nor will he that forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is an alien, a worldling, and an enemy. He cannot have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother" (The Unity of the Catholic Church 6, 1st ed. [A.D. 251]).

"Let them not think that the way of life or salvation exists for them, if they have refused to obey the bishops and priests, since the Lord says in the book of Deuteronomy: 'And any man who has the insolence to refuse to listen to the priest or judge, whoever he may be in those days, that man shall die' [Deut. 17:12]. And then, indeed, they were killed with the sword . . . but now the proud and insolent are killed with the sword of the Spirit, when they are cast out from the Church. For they cannot live outside, since there is only one house of God, and there can be no salvation for anyone except in the Church" (Letters 61[4]: 4 [A.D. 253]).

"When we say, 'Do you believe in eternal life and the remission of sins through the holy Church?' we mean that remission of sins is not granted except in the Church" (ibid., 69[70]:2 [A.D. 253]).

Lactantius

"It is, therefore, the Catholic Church alone which retains true worship. This is the fountain of truth; this, the domicile of faith; this, the temple of God. Whoever does not enter there or whoever does not go out from there, he is a stranger to the hope of life and salvation. . . . Because, however, all the various groups of heretics are confident that they are the Christians and think that theirs is the Catholic Church, let it be known that this is the true Church, in which there is confession and penance and which takes a health-promoting care of the sins and wounds to which the weak flesh is subject" (Divine Institutes 4:30:11–13 [A.D. 307]).

Jerome

"Heretics bring sentence upon themselves since they by their own choice withdraw from the Church, a withdrawal which, since they are aware of it, constitutes damnation. Between heresy and schism there is this difference: that heresy involves perverse doctrine, while schism separates one from the Church on account of disagreement with the bishop. Nevertheless, there is no schism which does not trump up a heresy to justify its departure from the Church" (Commentary on Titus 3:10–11 [A.D. 386]).

Augustine

"We believe also in the holy Church, that is, the Catholic Church. For heretics violate the faith itself by a false opinion about God; schismatics, however, withdraw from fraternal love by hostile separations, although they believe the same things we do. Consequently, neither heretics

nor schismatics belong to the Catholic Church; not heretics, because the Church loves God; and not schismatics, because the Church loves neighbour" (Faith and the Creed 10:21 [A.D. 393]).

"Whoever is separated from this Catholic Church, by this single sin of being separated from the unity of Christ, no matter how estimable a life he may imagine he is living, shall not have life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (ibid., 141:5).

Tim Staples, a convert from the Assemblies of God, and now a Catholic apologist has written:

‘There are four key points that I believe we need to remember here. 1) No one who rejects the truth will be saved. It doesn’t matter how good of a Muslim, Jew, Baptist, or anything else one is. If one rejects the truth of Christ and his Church they will be lost. If you, me or any Catholic rejects the truth of the Catholic Faith, we will be lost. 2) Religions that have as tenants of their respective faiths, the rejection of Jesus and his Church have no power to save anyone. It is “the truth that makes us free” (cf. John 8:32) not falsehood. 3) In the case of one who is ignorant of the truth of the Catholic Faith, “through no fault of their own” they can be saved, if they are truly “invincibly ignorant, are given the supernatural virtue of faith and have perfect charity in their hearts” (cf. Instruction of Holy Office of Dec. 20, 1949). 4) We must remember that we are not the judges of salvation. God is the only and final judge. We do not know who is truly “invincibly ignorant” and who is not. Therefore, we must be careful to “evangelize all men” as the Catechism commands us and leave the judging to God (see I Cor. 4:2-5).’

So Bill, I hope that you understand the Church’s teaching in this regard. Of course for the first eleven centuries there was only one CHURCH, the Catholic Church, so this belief would not have been quite as controversial that is for sure. In the latest issue of Envoy, (Volume 7.3) a Catholic magazine, a reader sent a question about this very issue. Let me give it to you as it appeared:

“Q: I am a twenty-year old Christian girl who has been seeking out the Roman Catholic faith for two years now – a journey that began with reading Rome Sweet Home by Scott and Kimberly Hahn during my senior year in high school. I have been putting off converting for various reasons, mostly due to the impact it would have on my relationship with my staunch Baptist family. Like St. Paul, I find myself “betwixt two places.” My heart and soul long to participate in the fullness of faith, yet I have not taken that proverbial “leap of faith.” This is where my question comes in. A while back, I came upon a statement in the Catechism that says, “Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it”. Thus, if I were to die – being convinced that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church established by Christ, and being in agreement with all she teaches – without having been received into the Church, would I be condemned to hell? This question has been a heavy burden upon my heart! I look forward to your reply.

A: This is a difficult question to answer. If someone ‘knows that the Catholic Church was founded by God as necessary through Christ’ and yet, “refused to enter” they could not be saved. I emphasize the ‘if’ because this is the crux of the matter in an individual case. When does a particular individual “know” these things, and what exactly is a “refusal to enter”? This is the

kind of internal matter about which the Church says, “De internis neque Ecclesia” (“not even the Church can make a judgement on what goes on in a person’s heart,” or “in the internal forum”). The Church states the principle; the heart is known to God alone. So we can never state about an individual that they have been condemned, not even about someone such as Judas. There is a real difficulty for converts. John Henry Newman knew for quite some time (two or three years, if I recall rightly from his autobiography, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* – a classic of the English language as well as a very good spiritual reading which I strongly recommend you read) that he would have to become Catholic. But he had a difficulty taking the final step. Family is often a large part of it (though for Newman, it was his close friends rather than his family). Ultimately, however, you owe yourself to Christ and He must come first. It won’t necessarily get any easier by waiting, and one should have a healthy respect for grace. “Time Iesum transeuntem, et non redeuntem,” St. Augustine said: “Fear Jesus passing by, and not coming back.” So I hope you will very soon take the step you know you are called to. No matter what the consequences – and on a temporal level Christ gives us no guarantees, other than that the path we will follow is His, with the Cross – He will never let you down.

There is a really good article by James Akin on the Necessity of Being Catholic. You can read it here: <http://www.cin.org/users/james/files/necessit.htm>

Finally Bill, you commented on the ‘sacrament of the mass’, I assume you meant the ‘Sacrifice of the Mass’ meaning the Eucharist, as the Mass itself is not a sacrament. The teaching on the Eucharist alone could take up a whole other letter to you. The Eucharist is indeed a true sacrifice, not just a commemorative meal, as I once believed. The first Christians also knew this and stated so in their writings. Again, these are the Christians in the first 250 years of the Church who knew the teachings closest to the source...Jesus and His Apostles. Here are a few of these writings:

The Didache

"Assemble on the Lord’s day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until he has been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice [Matt. 5:23–24]. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, ‘Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations’ [Mal. 1:11, 14]" (Didache 14 [A.D. 70]).

Pope Clement I

"Our sin will not be small if we eject from the episcopate those who blamelessly and holily have offered its sacrifices. Blessed are those presbyters who have already finished their course, and who have obtained a fruitful and perfect release" (Letter to the Corinthians 44:4–5 [A.D. 80]).

Ignatius of Antioch

"Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist; for there is but one Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with his Blood, and one single altar of sacrifice—even as there is also but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow servitors, the

deacons. This will ensure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of God" (Letter to the Philadelphians 4 [A.D. 110]).

Justin Martyr

"God speaks by the mouth of Malachi, one of the twelve [minor prophets], as I said before, about the sacrifices at that time presented by you: 'I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord, and I will not accept your sacrifices at your hands; for from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, my name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles . . . [Mal. 1:10–11]. He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us [Christians] who in every place offer sacrifices to him, that is, the bread of the Eucharist and also the cup of the Eucharist" (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew 41 [A.D. 155]).

Irenaeus

"He took from among creation that which is bread, and gave thanks, saying, 'This is my body.' The cup likewise, which is from among the creation to which we belong, he confessed to be his blood. He taught the new sacrifice of the new covenant, of which Malachi, one of the twelve [minor] prophets, had signified beforehand: 'You do not do my will, says the Lord Almighty, and I will not accept a sacrifice at your hands. For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice; for great is my name among the Gentiles, says the Lord Almighty' [Mal. 1:10–11]. By these words he makes it plain that the former people will cease to make offerings to God; but that in every place sacrifice will be offered to him, and indeed, a pure one, for his name is glorified among the Gentiles" (Against Heresies 4:17:5 [A.D. 189]). –This only occurs in the Catholic Church around the world...a fulfillment of prophecy.

Cyprian of Carthage

"If Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, is himself the high priest of God the Father; and if he offered himself as a sacrifice to the Father; and if he commanded that this be done in commemoration of himself, then certainly the priest, who imitates that which Christ did, truly functions in place of Christ" (Letters 63:14 [A.D. 253]).

Again these are all before The Roman Empire officially became Christian. Amazing, hey? So the Church does not make up these things. The Eucharist is the pinnacle of our worship. Just read John 6 with an open heart and hear Christ's words again. Through this 'Sacrifice of the Mass' Christ becomes present to us, Body, Soul and Divinity. It is through the sacraments that God gives us grace. Christ is not sacrificed again. His death is once-for-all, but at the Mass it is a re-presentation of His sacrifice. You have to remember that "what Jesus Christ was yesterday, and is today, he remains forever" (Heb. 13:8) As Karl Keating writes in 'Catholicism and Fundamentalism', "What Jesus did in the past is present to God now, and God can make the sacrifice of Calvary present to us at Mass." I Cor. 11:26ff states: For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and

blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. If we discerned ourselves, we would not be under judgment; but since we are judged by (the) Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that your meetings may not result in judgment. The other matters I shall set in order when I come.” This certainly indicates much more than a symbol.

It was natural for early Christians to think of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. Even J.N. Kelly, a protestant Church historian wrote that in the early Church “the Eucharist was regarded as the distinctively Christian sacrifice”.

See this website where I have taken much of this information.

http://www.catholic.com/library/Sacrifice_of_the_Mass.asp

Also take a look at some of these articles on the Eucharist.

http://www.chnetwork.org/journals/eucharist/eucharist_4.htm

http://www.catholic.com/library/Real_Presence.asp

This ought to keep you busy for a while if you are interested in understanding Catholic Doctrine. I know that it has been a long letter, but I hope you understand now, more of my reasons for becoming Catholic. It is something I cherish along with my family. I hope that this letter has in no way come across as being unkind, as I truly value your friendship. I have given you lots to think about.

I will pray for you, and I hope you will do the same for me.

Your Brother In Him
Rick