

A few misconceptions about Catholicism

BY KARLA KRAYNAK BRUNO

In light of recent violence in the name of religion, Gazette Editor Rusty Carter asked for essays on common misconceptions about specific religions. While it is usually best to address such notions individually as they crop up, a general assessment of the usual suspects regarding Catholicism is now in order.

As a lifelong Catholic from a military family, I have seen more than my share of parishes and communities, secular and non, met people of all faiths, and heard firsthand the misguided things people *think* they know about Catholicism.

ESSAY

Here are the most pervasive myths:

☒ "Catholics aren't saved." Yes, we are, if you define "saved" as accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

☒ "Catholics worship Mary." No, we don't. We think she's pretty special, being the Mother of God, but we don't worship her.

☒ "Catholics pray to saints instead of going directly to God or Jesus." No. We do not omit going to God and Jesus. We just branch out for assistance in communicating with God and Jesus. Anyone who has ever asked a friend or prayer circle to pray for them does the same thing.

☒ "Catholics worship statues." No, we don't. See the second and third bullets. Worship is restricted to Jesus and God.

☒ "Catholics can't use birth control." Yes, we can. It's just natural, not artificial. Google "Natural Family Planning." The underlying tenet is an openness to life, which is definitively Catholic.

☒ "Everything the Pope says is infallible." Not true. There are only a very few things that have been declared "infallible," things that are the very essence of Christianity: Jesus was the Son of God; he was born, died, and resurrected. That sort of thing. All other papal opinions are just opinions. Steeped in history, theology, prayer and intended as principled leadership — but open for discussion always.

☒ "I didn't know Catholics read the Bible." Favorite response, given by a priest to a sales clerk in a Christian book store: "Madam, we wrote it."

☒ "Catholic priests can't be married." Not the whole truth. You don't see them very often in the Roman Catholic Church, but they exist, mostly as converts from other faiths. They don't show up in local parishes but work in diocesan offices or other nonparish locales. Further, the Eastern Rite (the other lung of the holy, universal Catholic Church) permits all priests to be married. They are Catholic, too.

Converts and Eastern Rite priests can be married before ordination to the priesthood, but not after. Also, widowers may enter the priesthood. Hence, the lovely grandfather-turned-priest I once knew in Newport News.

☒ "Rosaries are required." Nope. They are a means to an end — a closer relationship with God — but not required. Catholics employ many devotionals, all with the same parameters. None required, all encouraged to develop a spiritual life that keeps you centered on God.

Misconceptions happen to all of us.

The best of us recognize this and remedy incorrect thinking. The solution is to read more about all of it, discern where truth and reason exist, and then speak accordingly. If you really want to understand a religion, read everything you can (books, blogs, news reports, pamphlets) and then make assessments based on the actions you see — and by those you don't.

St. Bede Catholic Church and St. Olaf Catholic Church offer religious education year-round, and it is open to anyone, any time. You don't have to be a member of the parish or even wish to convert to sit in. If you simply want to learn more, be better informed, then please go, ask questions, get answers. You'll be glad you did, even if you don't choose to stay.

Karla Kraynak Bruno of Alexandria is a cradle Catholic and former parishioner at St. Bede and St. Olaf Catholic churches.