THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN 5 MOMENTS

LIBBY: How old are you here?

KAI: Like three, I guess.

LIBBY: You haven't changed a bit.

KAI: What? But I'm so much taller, and I've got this deep voice, and I don't play with toys anymore.

LIBBY: Well, you can change and still stay the same. You know, you're like a tadpole, or a caterpillar, or the Catholic Church.

KAI: Huh?

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Welcome to Catholic Central.

LIBBY: The Catholic Church emerged from the ministry of Jesus in the First Century A.D., but the way things are today is not exactly how things have always been.

KAI: For example, Catholics no longer follow Jewish law or say Mass exclusively in Latin.

LIBBY: And though people used to get baptized naked, if you'd tried to do that now, the result would probably not be a warm welcome into the Church.

KAI: For an organization that talks about Eternal Truth, you might wonder what's going on.

LIBBY: Is the Church deciding to change the truth? Will it change a lot more in the future?

KAI: And with all these changes, is it still the same church founded by Jesus Christ? But first, let's get clear on what we're talking about. The Church doesn't see itself like Congress, which gets together and decides for itself what the laws should be. Not a good day.

LIBBY: Instead, the metaphor the Church uses is the Body of Christ here on Earth.

KAI: Just like a human body, it can grow and change while still belonging to the same person.

LIBBY: Let's be honest, over the centuries, the Church has had some growing pains, and has responded by re-evaluating things in order to live its purpose more fully.

KAI: Or in the words of the second Vatican Council, "The understanding of the things and words handed down grows, through the contemplation and study of believers, which tends continually toward the fullness of divine truth."

LIBBY: While some Christian denominations viewed the Bible as the only source of spiritual truth, or say that every word is to be taken literally, Catholics believe that we should also draw onto other things.

KAI: Reason, our own God-given ability to use our minds to make logical sense of the world around us, to think, interpret, understand and make judgments.

LIBBY: And tradition, the collective wisdom of those who've come before us, who've wrestled with these same questions for centuries, guided by the Holy Spirit.

KAI: So, how has this worked in history?

LIBBY: Moment number one: Post-Resurrection. In the first decades after the life of Jesus on Earth, His followers disagreed about whether He was only a Messiah for the Jews or whether His message was for all human beings.

KAI: Some of the early Church leaders believed that to be Christian, people would have to follow the Jewish law from the Old Testament.

LIBBY: Like not eating pork and males getting ...

KAI: But the Apostles Peter, Barnabas, and Paul, who had already been spreading the message of Jesus to the non-Jewish Greeks, argued that Jesus had made those laws unnecessary.

LIBBY: Around 50 A.D., they had a council in Jerusalem, which we call, get this, the Council of Jerusalem, to talk it all out together. Through this process of open discussion, they provided an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to guide their hearts in the right direction.

KAI: Ultimately, they realize that things like circumcision were spiritually unnecessary, because their purpose was to distinguish Jews from those around them.

LIBBY: But other principles from Jewish law, like not worshiping idols and being sexually faithful, are good for everyone spiritually.

KAI: So they would apply to Christians, as well.

LIBBY: Over the next three centuries, a series of other Church councils together to try to find a clearer shared understanding of Jesus' message and what God is like -- ideas like the Trinity, the Incarnation, and grace.

KAI: Back then, being a Christian was a radical, dangerous choice, that most people weren't ready to make.

LIBBY: In those early years, Christians were a persecuted and often secret minority in the Roman Empire.

KAI: They had to make moral decisions for themselves, but they weren't in charge of countries and armies, which leads to ...

LIBBY: Moment number two: Post-Constantine. That dynamic started to change in 313 A.D., when the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great make Christianity legal in the empire, via the Edict of Milan.

KAI: Before then, Christians had been famous for being pacifists, sometimes preferring martyrdom over fighting in the army.

LIBBY: Active soldiers weren't allowed to be baptized unless they gave up their careers.

KAI: But as Christianity came to be the dominant religion of the empire over the next century, Christians were leaders entrusted with protecting innocent people from harm. They had to ask themselves, “Is it moral to fight to defend the weak and vulnerable, or is it more moral to let barbarians rip them to shreds?”

LIBBY: Great thinkers like Saint Augustine wrestled with how to apply Christ’s teaching to these new circumstances.

KAI: Basic moral truth didn't change, but the reality of protecting innocence required a new application. This led thinkers of the Middle Ages to wrestle with what it means to fight just or unjust wars, and all those wars led to ...

LIBBY: Moment number three: Post-Reformation.

KAI: When people started breaking away as Protestants, this forced the Church to reevaluate itself and its role in the world, in a process called the Counter-Reformation. Up to then, it had had huge political and economic power, but this had also bred corruption and distraction within the Church.

LIBBY: The Church held a council at Trent, Italy-

KAI: Imaginatively called the Council of Trent.

LIBBY: ... to get its priorities back in order and handle the crisis. The council focused on turning the Church back toward the spiritual realm, the mission that it's uniquely qualified to fulfill.

KAI: The ideas of the Counter-Reformation led to a great flourishing of saints and thinkers, who opened new ways for the Church to help people connect with God in deeper and more personal relationships.

LIBBY: Saints like Teresa of Avila, Charles Borromeo and Ignatius of Loyola called for greater integrity in the Church and offered new perspectives on spirituality.

KAI: The reforms of the Counter-Reformation, like crackdowns on the corrupt sale of indulgences, weren't changes to moral law.

LIBBY: Rather, they were Catholics realizing that they hadn't been following the true moral law properly and trying to get closer to the example Jesus set for humanity.

KAI: After the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, starting in the 1600s, European society was transformed by new ideas in science, philosophy, and art. These ways of thinking sought to find the truth and beauty through paths other than religion, known as the Enlightenment, which leads to ...

LIBBY: Moment number four: Post-Enlightenment. These ideas challenged what many Catholics believed, but because of its philosophical emphasis on reason, the Church took the lead among Christian denominations in embracing many new ideas, like the scientific method, as compliments to faith.

KAI: Catholic scientists and academic institutions saw science as a way of better understanding God and the beauty of the universe. For example, in 1891, Pope Leo XIII re-founded the Vatican Observatory, so that everyone might see clearly that the Church and her pastors are not opposed to true and solid science, whether human or divine.

LIBBY: Science was transforming society in many other ways. Steamships and later airplanes were connecting the world like never before. The Church was encountering new global perspectives, and social reform movements change the way people lived, which leads to ...

KAI: Moment number five: the Contemporary Church. In 1959, Pope Saint John XXIII realized that some of the practices used to express the Faith weren't keeping up with the needs of contemporary life.

LIBBY: He realized he needed to throw up in the windows of the Church and let the fresh air of the Spirit blow through, and go back to the basics of Scripture, to look at how to interpret, preach and live it for the present day.

KAI: He called the second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, to see how the Church could translate its mission to be the most effective in our time.

LIBBY: Bishop sought input from the laity and made a series of changes, like celebrating Mass in the local language of each church instead of Latin. They also gave a greater role to the laity in Catholic life, which actually was a throwback to the very early Church.

KAI: Which brings up an important point. Part of every reform movement is finding our way back to our original identity, and it's ongoing.

LIBBY: There are many questions still before the Church, like how to think about economic systems that create great wealth but leave others in poverty, the ethics of using new technologies, or other societal changes we don't even know about yet.

KAI: But with scripture, tradition, and reason working together, we can get ever closer to truth and to God.

LIBBY: That being said-

KAI: We can't ever predict how the Church will develop, and the Church thinks in centuries, which is about how long would go on if we didn't end right now.

For Catholic Central, I'm Kai.

LIBBY: And I'm Libby. If you liked this, be sure to hit like and subscribe.

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KAI: Thanks for watching.