WHAT’S CATHOLIC?

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai.

LIBBY: This is Catholic Central.

KAI: And, today, we're gonna be talking about the Albigensian Heresy of the late 12th Century.

LIBBY: No, the topic is “What's Catholic?”

KAI: Oh, well, then, how would you describe me in a few words?

LIBBY: Well, unprepared, and your shirt's a little wrinkled.

KAI: Okay. Well, I'm not going to iron a T-shirt.

LIBBY: Well, maybe you should.

KAI: And besides, don't just focus on the negative. I mean, how well do you actually know me?

LIBBY: Oh, I see what you're doing, people respond the same way when you ask them what “Catholic” means, right?

KAI: That's right. What do they say?

LIBBY: It's just a bunch of rules and rituals. It's boring. It needs to get with the times. Is it possible that people who say those things haven't experienced what Catholicism really is?

KAI: Let's find out. Today, we're going to talk about how the Pope, a hobbit, and Van Gogh are all connected.

LIBBY: Van Gogh?

KAI: Yeah, Van Gogh.

LIBBY: All right.

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

KAI: Let's start with the word “catholic” itself. Catholic with a little “c” means universal, for all people at all times. Catholic with a big “C” refers to the Catholic Church, based in Rome.

LIBBY: So, it's a church?

KAI: It's a church. In fact, it's the first-ever church, established by Jesus Himself.

LIBBY: When Jesus walked the earth, He taught people about the meaning of human life, about forgiveness, about love and serving others. This is still the main purpose of the Church.

KAI: To continue this mission, Jesus established the Church, and passed the spiritual authority down to the apostles, led by St. Peter.

LIBBY: He said to Peter, "You are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church." The first Pope, which means “Papa.” Peter is the first father of the church.

KAI: Then Peter passed his authority down to Linus, the next pope. Then he passed it out down to the next guy and the next guy, and the next guy, and the next guy, all the way until today. The traditional term for this is apostolic succession, meaning, the authority of Jesus passed on to the apostles and to the bishops who came after, who succeed each other throughout history.

LIBBY: It's a fairly awesome timeline, 21 centuries, and some pretty interesting popes along the way. But we'll save that for our pope episode.

KAI: Our “Pope-i-sode.”

LIBBY: The pope, who's also the Bishop of Rome, is the leader of all the other bishops around the world.

KAI: Each of these bishops deals with a smaller geographic area called a diocese. The bishops inform the Pope about what's up in their local churches.

LIBBY: Each diocese, each area of the world, has its unique concerns, with different perspectives on God and ways of expressing their faith.

KAI: Still, in the diversity of cultures, languages, gifts and needs, Catholics find a unity in and through the Church.

LIBBY: But the faith hasn't just been handed down to the bishops, but to every Catholic, in their own special way, in their own place and time. They're all called to pray, love and serve just like the Apostles.

KAI: So, apostolic succession, universality. What else really makes Catholics Catholic?

LIBBY: The sacraments.

KAI: One of the most important ways that Catholics know and experience God. Sacraments are the visible sign of God's invisible grace.

LIBBY: Catholics believe grace means God's love that's given away, God's life flowing to our life.

KAI: Let's start with the bread and wine of Eucharist, or Holy Communion, one of the biggest sacraments of the Church. The priest blesses the bread and wine, and afterwards, people come up the aisle to receive them.

LIBBY: You can see the bread and wine, right? Those are the visible signs. But Catholics believe that Jesus is actually present in these signs, that's what you can't see.

KAI: But more on this in another episode. The Eucharist is one of seven sacraments. The others of which are Baptism, Reconciliation or Confession, Confirmation, Matrimony – that's marriage – Holy Orders – making priests – and the Anointing of the Sick, which used to be known only as Last Rites.

LIBBY: Visible signs of God's invisible grace.

KAI: I know what you're thinking, so far, this sounds like a lot of religion. But Catholicism goes beyond what happens in a church building. It's a whole spirituality, and way of looking at life. It's called sacramentality.

LIBBY: Sacramentality has to do with experiencing God everywhere.

KAI: Like when I see an awesome sunset on the ocean, it's God speaking to me?

LIBBY: Catholics would remind you that the sunset and the water aren't God, but the beauty of God is revealed through them. Catholics don't just look for God in the glory of nature, but in art, each other, and they say God may use any of their senses.

KAI: Right, that's the same reason that catholic celebrations are big on smells and bells, the incense, candles, oil, water.

LIBBY: Right, and even their bodies and senses. That's why Catholics stand and kneel and cross themselves at Mass.

KAI: Yes, the old Catholic fitness workout. The God who gave us the Bible and sent Jesus, continues to reach out to humanity through reason, beauty, culture … actually, all of life.

LIBBY: Then you'd think this would have an impact over time, not just, thanks for the random acts of kindness, but in a bigger scheme of things.

KAI: Well, and it has. It helps explain why the Church has had such a huge influence on history and culture. Even our most skeptical friends have to admit that Catholicism helped formed civilizations.

LIBBY: Catholics built some of the first hospitals, and are still the largest non-government provider of healthcare. Catholics invented the modern university, and they taught science and math and physics, any subject that points to truth.

KAI: Catholics believe the more they know about the earth or the universe, the more they can comprehend the work of God.

LIBBY: Today, the Vatican still operates telescopes and laboratories. The guy who came up with the Big Bang theory was actually a Catholic priest.

KAI: And so were the people who developed the scientific method.

LIBBY: And so was Gregor Mendel, the father of modern genetics.

KAI: And many of the greatest thinkers, artists, architects and writers of all time were Catholic.

LIBBY: Hey Kai, I think this sounds like a game of Categories.

KAI: Categories!

ANNOUNCER:

The game of Categories. Famous Catholics in history.

KAI: Sir Thomas More, statesman and martyr.

LIBBY: Leonardo Da Vinci, inventor and artist.

KAI: Antoni Gaudi, architect.

LIBBY: Dorothy Day, social reformer.

KAI: Lech Walesa, national liberator and Nobel Prize winner. Steve Carell, you know, guy in “The Office.”

LIBBY: And Mother Teresa; everyone knows Mother Teresa.

KAI: And wait, yeah, “Lord of the Rings” author, J. R. R. Tolkien, was Catholic too.

LIBBY: Oh, got a text.

V/O KAI: Hey guys, I'm spiritual but not religious. Why do I need so many church's rules?

KAI: I'm going to play the Chesterton card here.

LIBBY: British author, G. K. Chesterton.

KAI: Chesterton said, "Catholic doctrine and discipline may be walls. But they are the walls of a playground."

LIBBY: So all the doctrines and disciplines are there to protect you.

KAI: Right, I mean, can you imagine if everyone had to discover for themselves not to run into traffic.

LIBBY: Ouch.

KAI: But the rules are not just there to protect you. For Catholics, they are there to free them up to live the fullest life possible.

LIBBY: You mean, like happiness?

KAI: Like happiness, and a framework to live out their spirituality. Like the framework of the rules of a game.

LIBBY: Like when you play football.

KAI: I don't play football.

LIBBY: OK, like when you play ...

KAI: Badminton.

LIBBY: Badminton. If there were no rules when you're playing, it would be total chaos, and it wouldn't be fun anymore.

KAI: But there's another big question, if Catholicism is so great ...

LIBBY: Unfortunately, the Church has flawed human beings in it, and some of them are going to do bad things. But if you look back in every generation, the Holy Spirit sends reformers, and they get the Church back on track, which is all about continuing God's service one earth.

KAI: So, one thing Catholics aren't is perfect. They're human.

LIBBY: They're human, yes, but among other things, that means they're called to be holy.

KAI: Which doesn't mean better than everybody. It means discovering our individual spiritual destiny and following it.

LIBBY: All those Catholic saints, St. Francis, St. Anthony, St. Therese, all 10,000 of them and counting, they didn't think they were better, they just figured out why they were here and went for it.

KAI: Somebody said saints are sinners who just keep trying.

LIBBY: Remember what Pope Francis often said, "The Church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners."

KAI: And that gets to the heart of what Catholicism really is.

LIBBY: A love story. God's love story, giving us this incredible universe, Jesus dying on the cross, rising, giving us the Church. Why? Because He loves us.

KAI: Let's wrap it all up with an image. No, wrong image. Nope. There we go.

LIBBY: Van Gogh's starry night?

KAI: Van Gogh, yeah. When it comes down to it, Catholicism is like a haunting work of art: the brush strokes, colors, composition, all working together, a mysterious unity and transcendence. And every time you look at it, you find something new.

LIBBY: So, when we say Catholic, we mean a universal church.

KAI: A sacramental way of seeing the world and living life.

LIBBY: A historical force for positive change affecting a worldwide family.

KAI: A love story about God and human destiny, about happiness and peace.

LIBBY: And a mystery.

KAI: We can't define it in 10 minutes, or 10 years, or 10,000. It's ever-ancient, ever-new. Well, that's it for now. I'm Kai.

LIBBY: And I'm Libby, this is Catholic Central. We'll see you next time.

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