

### “Bring a Non-Catholic to Mass”

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IT WAS A SUNDAY JUST LIKE ANY OTHER. At the end of Mass, the priest said, “Next week, bring a non-Catholic to Mass.” I turned to my wife and whispered, “I have someone in mind.”

I had a Chinese coworker whom I will call “John.” He and I often talked about philosophical topics such as the meaning of life. At first, John was an atheist, but through our conversations, he had moved into agnosticism. Accepting Thomas Aquinas’ arguments for the existence of God wasn’t too hard for John because he often praised Aristotle, and Aquinas seemed like a continuation of Aristotle.

Discussing Aquinas was good progress in our conversational catechesis, but getting from Aquinas to Jesus seemed far off. So one day I decided to jump right to it and asked point-blank:

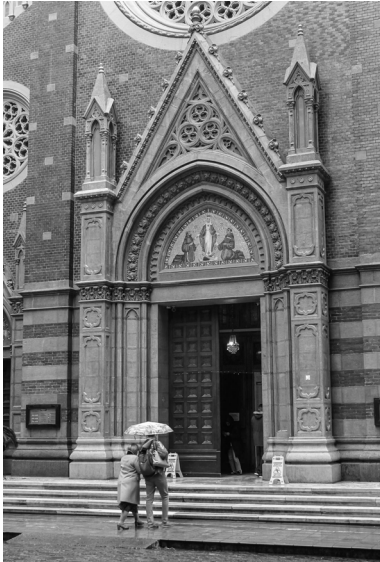
“Who do you say that Jesus is?” John was surprised by my question.

“My understanding is that he founded Christianity,” he

responded politely, “but I need to read more about his philosophy.”

Not knowing where to go from there, I told John that I would find some material and get back to him. But I felt lost. Should I talk about the historicity of the Gospels? Should I explain that Jesus is the only person in history to be preannounced? Should I tell John that Jesus is God?

Before I could find the material that I had I promised to give John, I found myself at church, at that liturgy, with Father



encouraging us to bring a non-Catholic to Mass. So, back at work, I took the plunge and said to John, “The best way to understand Jesus is by taking you to Mass next Sunday.” He didn’t hesitate to accept my invitation.

When Sunday came, I waited for John in the parking lot, and then my family and I accompanied him into the church. I could tell he was curious about the reverence parishioners showed toward the altar. As the Mass began, I waited for the priest to say something along the lines of, “Welcome all non-Catholics; I will explain the Mass.”

However, he began celebrating the Mass as usual. It was a beautiful liturgy, as always, and the priest gave a wonderful homily—but he made no special mention to acknowledge any guests.

John was respectful; he stood and kneeled with the rest of the congregation. As the time to go forward for Communion approached, I felt awkward, as I had been counting on the priest to explain the Eucharist to my non-Catholic invitee. There was no explanation. So before Communion, I briefly explained that the Eucharist was the Body of Jesus and that there was a process to receive First Communion. John politely smiled and waited in the pew for me and my family to return from receiving. Once the Mass was over, John thanked us for the invitation and went to his car. I didn’t know what else to say. I could only think, *Holy Spirit, I truly do not know what to do; please help me.*

I saw John at work for the next few days, but he was busy and we didn’t get to speak about his Mass experience. When the

opportunity came a week later, I said, “You must have questions.” He told me he didn’t have any questions and thanked me again for inviting him to Mass.

The following week, John and I went out to lunch. I skipped the explanation of how God is revealed to us in the Bible and went straight into the fact that Jesus is God. Then, I paraphrased St. Augustine: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Jesus . . . we are made for him, and it’s only in Jesus that we find peace.” John did not contradict my statement. We had lunch two more times over the next few weeks, and I continued to mention Jesus in our conversations.

A month after we had been to Mass, we were driving from lunch back to work. Out of the blue, John said, “I want to be baptized.” I began shaking a bit, my eyes were watery, and my heart rate considerably increased as I looked back at him.

“OK,” I said simply, “let me find out the process.” But inside, I thought to myself, *How could this be? He’s been to Mass only once in his life, and now he wants to be baptized!* Then, turning to the opposite window, I whispered, “Thank you, Holy Spirit.”

That same afternoon, I called the parish nearest to John and enrolled him in RCIA; the class had just begun a week before. During the enrollment, they asked me, “Are you the sponsor?” I answered, “Yes . . . I think so.”

In this particular parish, the sponsor accompanies the candidate to every class. From September to April, John and I met in the parking lot before Mass, and afterward, we attended RCIA class.

At the Easter Vigil, John was baptized and received First Communion and Confirmation. Even before receiving his sacraments, he started attending Wednesday Mass before work. He sends me a message every Christmas and Easter without missing a beat. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, John loves Jesus.

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**Art Credit:** People Walking towards Entrance to Church of St Anthony of Padua in Istanbul, Ismail O. Ukav, Pexels.com