

Does God Have Favorites? WEEK FOUR November 9 2025

Last week I attended a convocation in the town of Cambridge on Maryland's Eastern Shore. 220 priests, three cardinals, and three auxiliary bishops met for three days.

It was an amazing event.

At our first session on Tuesday evening I found myself marveling at the rich diversity among the clergy of our archdiocese.

Our oldest priest is 96 years old.

I saw him chatting with a priest who is just 26 years old.

We have priests from every continent who are fluent in multiple languages.

The whole spectrum of life experiences are represented as well as different approaches to ministry.

This beautiful mosaic of leaders seem to perfectly fit the Church they serve - a Church which is just as diverse and multicultural.

Cardinal McElroy spoke on the first night.

He told us about getting the call from Pope Francis asking him to move from San Diego California to become the Archbishop of Washington.

Here's what he said, *"I was 71 years old and quite happy where I was. But now I'm here. And I want you to know that in my heart, Washington is now my home."*

His words really moved me.

In sharing something so personal, I felt like he was speaking for all of us.

Reminding us that it doesn't matter who you are, where you live - doesn't matter what language you speak or what life experiences you've had, the Church is universal.

And the Church is your home.

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This is Week Four of our message series which asks the question,
Does God have favorites?

Today's message coincides with a
special Church celebration.

The title for this Mass is, the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome.
That's a mouthful.

To help you understand what this celebration is about, let me give you a brief history.

In the year 325 AD, the Roman Emperor was a man named Constantine.

Before Constantine, Christians had to worship in secret for fear of being arrested.

But then he converted and

made Christianity the official religion.

And he decided to give one of his palaces,
the Lateran, to Pope Sylvester.

And it became the Church's first home.

So for 17 centuries a church has existed
at the Lateran.

Now, the pope is also the bishop of Rome.

And even though we usually see the pope at

St. Peter's Basilica, the official church of his diocese is the Lateran Basilica.

End of the history lesson.

But today's Mass isn't the celebration of a physical structure but a spiritual one.

It's not about "A" church but "*THE*" Church.

So in a sense, we are celebrating US because

WE are the Church.

Since the Catholic Church has been around for 2000 years,
there's a tendency to look down on other Christians.

But that would be wrong.

From its earliest days, the church has always been incredibly diverse -
made up of different nationalities, languages, and cultures
with different styles of worship.

In the New Testament the word “church” refers to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ.
But today we’re tackling the question,
Does God love Catholics more than other Christians?
Does God love Catholics more than other Christians?
To help us answer this question,
let’s turn to the readings.

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Our first reading is from the Book of the prophet Ezekiel.
Prophets were sent by God to remind his Chosen People of their calling.
So anytime they fell into sin, turned to idolatry, or forgot their mission,
prophets would challenge them to get back on track.
Because the Jewish people are our spiritual ancestors,
the messages which the prophets preached to them are also meant for us.
Today we heard that Ezekiel had a vision of water
flowing out from the gates of the temple in Jerusalem.
And everywhere the water flowed, trees sprang up -
fruit trees and trees with healing qualities.
Ezekiel was reminding the Jewish people that their faith
must flow out from them just like the rivers of water in his vision.
Their faith must be fertile and fruitful.
It’s a gift that must be shared with the whole world.
I love Ezekiel’s vision, especially that image of
the water flowing out of the gates of the temple.
It reminds me of the dismissal at the end of Mass.
After telling you to “go forth”, I stand on the front steps as you pour out of the doors,
heading back out into the world to share the Good News.
That was Ezekiel’s vision for everyone who believes in God.
It’s an awesome responsibility to be given,
and it’s our mission as members of Christ’s church.
A mission we are well equipped to carry out.
St. Paul reminded us of this in today’s second reading.

He wrote a letter to the church in Corinth -
a relatively new church but one that was already struggling with deep divisions.
There were rivalries and factions all vying for power.
He challenged them to build their church on a solid spiritual foundation.
St. Paul wrote this:

**SCREEN: No one can lay a foundation other than the one
that is there, namely Jesus Christ.**

Then he said that each of them is a temple of God
because the Holy Spirit dwells within them.
And this is true for every person who believes in Christ
regardless of which church they belong to.
The foundation of our faith is Jesus Christ.

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This year marks the 60th anniversary of a landmark
Church document titled Nostra Aetate.
It defines the relationship between Catholics
and people of other faiths and religions.
The reason it's considered a landmark document
is because before 1965, the prevailing attitude among Catholics
was that they were the only ones going to heaven -
that there was no salvation outside of the Church.
Nostra Aetate clarified Church teaching saying that
we should respect those things within other religions that are true and holy -
things we commonly believe about God and faith and
how to treat one another.
The document says we should avoid judging,
condemning, or hating those who worship differently from us,
because in the end, we're all God's children called to live together in harmony and peace.
I love the Catholic Church.
I've dedicated my life to the Church and her mission.
I love our history and traditions.

Our sacraments and rituals.

Our teachings and beliefs.

And I know you do too - you wouldn't be here if you didn't.

I could never see myself belonging anywhere else.

As passionately committed as I am to the Catholic Church,

I've never thought that I'm better than Christians in other denominations.

Or that I'm holier than them.

That's not to say that we're all the same because we aren't.

To claim that we're identical is actually disrespectful

to each other's traditions and practices.

I have friends and family members

who belong to other churches,

and I'm sure you do too.

Like me, you probably also have family members

who no longer go to Mass or might have joined other denominations.

I know it can be distressing, maybe it even makes you angry.

Don't let your love for your Church lead to judging or criticizing them.

Getting angry or arguing with them won't bring them back,

it'll probably just confirm why they're not here.

Instead, simply love them and pray for them and be the best Catholic that you can be.

And if they've found another church where they're being spiritually fed,

be happy for them.

And like we read in *Nostra Aetate*, strive to find common ground with them.

Focus on those things you both know to be true and holy and good.

With so much division and hatred in our world right now,

our mission is to treat others - especially those we disagree or differ with - with love and respect.

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So to answer today's question,

no, we don't believe that God loves Catholics more than other Christians.

As we've seen in other weeks, God loves all of his children equally,

but is present to them in differing degrees based on their needs,
and to accomplish his purpose.

Jesus feels closer to those who chose to be his followers -
those who live their lives for him and his faith.

We call these people disciples and they can be found in every church.
None of us had control over the faith of the families we were born into,
so God wouldn't disfavor anyone for belonging
to a different denomination than ours.

What we do believe profoundly is that
the gospel message of Jesus is life saving.

So we should be committed to sharing it with anyone who hasn't heard it.

Today, as we celebrate our beautiful Church,
our spiritual home,

may the Lord renew and strengthen us

to live our faith with joy, with passion, and always with love. Amen. +