

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT

Being Born Again

Sometimes Catholics are challenged by other Christians concerning the authenticity of their faith. "You say you are a Christian, but have you been born again?" Perhaps the question gets asked in a different manner, but to the same effect: "You say you believe in Christ, but do you have a personal relationship with Jesus?" For many, unless one can identify the time and place where one was born again, the faith of such a Christian is said to be insufficient for salvation. The promise of eternal life in heaven is said to belong only to those who have been born again.

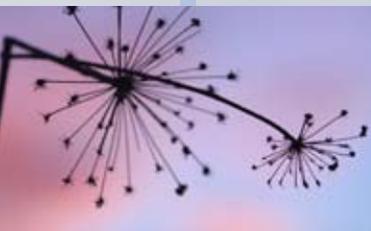
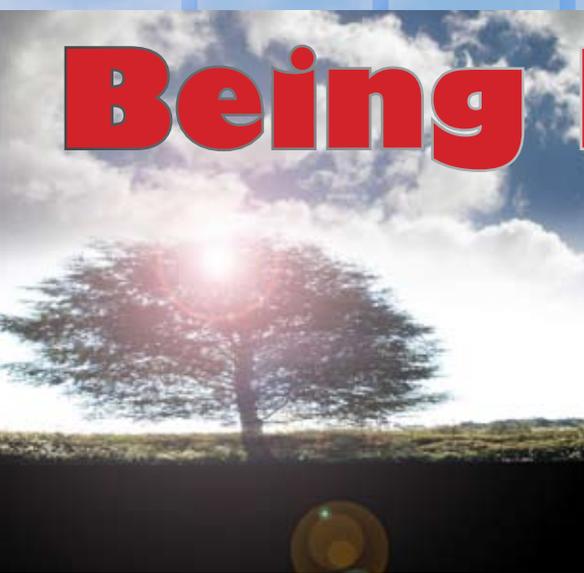
While most Catholics may not use "born-again" vocabulary or speak as freely about such an experience, it doesn't mean Catholics have missed out on a personal relationship with Christ. Catholics are made children of God through faith and the grace poured out on us at baptism. The same is true for all Christians, for anyone who has been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **But some Catholics may be personally unaware of God's love for them. The Bible assures us that God's intense love is meant to be part of Christian experience—of Catholic experience.**

Usually, when Christians talk about the importance of being born again, they are drawing from the passage in John's gospel (3:1-21) where Jesus meets the Pharisee named Nicodemus at night. A few other places in the Bible with phrases closely associated with being born again are found in James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:3, 23.

The Biblical Tradition

In many translations of John's gospel Jesus tells Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (3:7). In the original language the Greek phrase can also be expressed as "born from above." For example, in the New American Bible, a Catholic translation, Jesus says, "You must be born *from above*." Even here, Nicodemus responds to Jesus by asking, "How can a person once grown old be *born again*?" (3:4). The difference between Jesus' use of "born from above" and Nicodemus' "born

Have you or someone you are close to had what you consider a "born again" experience? What does that mean to you?





again” is a result of Nicodemus’ misunderstanding what Jesus is saying. Nicodemus is baffled to hear that Jesus says he must be born “again” if he wants to see the kingdom of God. Jesus, however, is telling him that he must be born from above.

The direction from which this birth occurs is of great importance. “From above” tells us that this birth comes about as a result of God’s initiative. It is the Spirit’s activity that makes this new life possible, and the new life is given through the gift of the Spirit poured out on us in baptism. “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (3:5).

What does Jesus tell Nicodemus that associates being “born from above” with baptism? (See John 3:3-5.)

How we come to belong to Christ, and our personal awareness of a relationship to God are really two different matters. The Bible does indeed suggest that Christians have every reason to be confident of their relationship to God in Christ, but beyond baptism, that confidence is not based on any particular religious experience.

For Catholics, there are certain essentials to a relationship with Christ that time and tradition have taught us provide the firmest foundation for a spiritual life. Sunday Mass participation, confession as needed, and daily prayers, especially on rising, retiring, and before meals, are to be a consistent pattern in our lives. The Bible is an essential and invaluable aid to spiritual growth. At Vatican II the church declared, “In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them” [*Dei Verbum* 21]. Bible study, in the company of fellow Catholics who are also seeking to grow in relationship with God through prayerful study and dialogue, can be a wonderful opportunity to grow in understanding of Scripture and in love with God.



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