



There are times, as a young Catholic, when we can feel a little alone. We might even be the only young Catholic we know, which is difficult, not to mention lonely.

But don't despair! Despite how you may feel, there are millions of young adult Catholics throughout the world. You are not alone. Many are trying to live out the faith. Do not be discouraged.

“Nowadays, everyone, including our young people, feels attracted by the many idols which take the place of God and appear to offer hope: money, success, power, pleasure. Often a growing sense of loneliness and emptiness in the hearts of many people leads them to seek satisfaction in these ephemeral idols. Dear brothers and sisters, let us be lights of hope!”

— Pope Francis July 24, 2013, Mass in the Basilica of the Shrine of Our Lady of the Conception, Aparecida, Brazil

Here are ten survival tips for when you're feeling on your own in your faith.

1. Embrace your rock star status.

Winner on the mountain top. Sport and active life concept

Sometimes as a young Catholic you can go to Sunday or Daily Mass and get stared at. You stand out because you're the youngest by about 30 years. I know this doesn't happen at every parish, but sometimes you are new and the parish doesn't have many

families. It can feel like everyone wants to know your business and where you're from and WHY you're here and 'have you thought about becoming a priest/nun yet?!

You feel like you're carrying the weight of an entire generation on your shoulders. Or someone is trying to matchmake you because and they have a niece/nephew /grandchild who "it would be great if you two could just meet". The pressure can be enormous.

However, consider these two things. Firstly, you don't have to answer to everyone or tell them your private business. Just keep friendly and polite. Secondly know that you are You are a symbol of HOPE. Which is pretty cool. You are so counter-cultural that you are a sign of hope that the Church is not dying out. That is why older people get so excited when they see you coming to Mass and you're the only under 40 year old there. Don't be afraid. Embrace it!

2. Accept new friendships, no matter the age difference.

Maybe you'd love to make some Catholic friends your own age, but that's not possible right now. However, don't underestimate how kind, caring and compassionate older generations of Catholics will be to you. Maybe you've just started at a new parish, are living alone for the first time, beginning a new job in a new location. There will be someone who will take you under their wing. Maybe their son or daughter just went off to college and they end up looking out for you each week and inviting you out for coffee and before you know it you have an awesome and unusual friendship developing that is a gift to both of you.

3. Frequent the Sacraments.

If being a young Catholic sometimes feels like wandering through the wilderness, then the Sacraments are your survival kit. They are where you really get to meet Christ face to face. So receive the Eucharist as often as you can, celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a month and know that this is where your strength lies!

4. Don't dump your friends!

Maybe you've recently converted or maybe you've just come back to your faith after a long time away. Or possibly you've gotten more serious in your faith. You might be in the situation where your friends now don't understand you and you are the only one of your group who believes in God. Don't alienate your friends. Definitely, there might be some friendships that you now need to reassess and move on from if they are not a good influence on you. But you still need your non Catholic friends. All good friendships help you become who you truly are and if they are good friends they will respect you and support you even if they don't understand you. You don't have to convert them or only speak about God to them. Just be yourself, strive to grow in holiness and I promise you,

you will inspire them in ways you don't even know.

5. All the blogs! All the websites!

The great thing about being Catholic is our faith is truly universal (that's the meaning of the word 'Catholic'). This universality extends to Catholic websites online. There are so many great Catholic websites, videos, Facebook groups that can support you in your faith and help you realize that you are not alone. (We're one of them!) No matter your style, interests or understanding of your faith, with enough digging you are sure to find something online that can support you in your faith.

If you have Catholic friends who are long distance, remember that you can pray and connect with them via Skype, Whatsapp and other similar apps. That way you won't feel so lonely in your faith and can keep praying for each other despite the distance.

6. If it doesn't exist, start your own.

I avoided Catholic youth groups like the plague when I was in my early teens because I didn't want to be a loser and I didn't want to be seen at them. I didn't believe they could offer me anything. However in my late teens and early twenties I was desperate for the support of a young adult's group. And you know what?! They didn't exist in any of the parishes I attended! So I started my own, which was scary. I didn't know if anyone would come, but they did. So don't be afraid to give it a try. Speak to your priest or parish rep. Whether it's a prayer group you want, a pizza-after-Mass-thing or a more outdoorsy hiking group, just start it, try it and see. Even if you only get a few people, that might be all you need.

7. Seek out Catholic conferences, retreats and festivals, pilgrimages and the ultimate: World Youth Day!

Again, at first, I didn't want to go to these events, wasting my precious free weekends and wages on getting there and buying tickets. But I had no idea what I was missing out on or how much they could help me! There is something for everyone so just keep searching online, on your diocesan website or check your parish newsletter. Whether you want an intellectual Catholic theology conference, a vocations festival, a young adult's retreat or charismatic camping, they all exist within the Catholic Church. I have found them totally worth the time and effort and have made friends for life at them, gained so much from them and really enjoyed myself. Remember, many events will have discounted fees, sponsored places or are donation only, so if money is an issue, don't be put off!

8. Use this time to build a solid prayer life.

Maybe you're lonely, really lonely, and maybe you really have no one to turn to support you in your faith right now. This is horrible, but turn it on its head and see it as a gift to get to know God better. Decide how you want your prayer life to be – try and spend a little bit of time morning and evening in prayer. Get to know your Bible really well – don't be afraid to highlight it and make it colorful and make it your own, so you can really see and remember how God is speaking to you. Keep a prayer journal – no one has to see it, no one will be judging it, so don't worry if you don't feel you can write. Just write to God and tell Him how you're feeling, or jot down a piece of Scripture that speaks to you. Draw pictures if you're into art. These are all ways that help you communicate with God and remember, He is interested in you!

9. Volunteer your time to help in the Church.

I first actually got into youth ministry because I wanted to work with other young Catholics and because I wanted to be less lonely in my faith and be in a more supportive environment. Thankfully, God also taught me how to be a good youth minister and I really saw the value of the work we did. If you really want to meet other young Catholics your age who will inspire you in your faith, and do some amazing work at the same time, then consider working for the Church. This could take the form of many things, from weekly volunteering at a soup kitchen or helping out with Confirmation classes, to an international gap year program or working at a Catholic Summer Camp. You'll grow in your own faith, experience new horizons and help other people to know Christ better. It's a win-win situation!

10. Know that this loneliness won't last forever.

Know that other young Catholics are out there – you just have to find them and that can take a bit of effort. However, even at your loneliest, when you have to make choices that leave you on your own or opt for something difficult in order to stay true to who you really are, know that you are never truly alone. You have Christ, who said “know that I am with you always, yes to the end of time.”(Matt 28:20)