

Ask Fr. James

Can I renounce the Catholic Faith and leave the church by a formal act of defection?

It used to be possible for someone who wanted to defect from the Catholic Church to meet with their local pastor who would help ensure they understood what they were seeking to do, fill out a form, send it to the Bishop and they would get a response from the chancery. Defection by formal act did not mean one can undo one's baptism, it meant one can formally apply the bishop for their name to be taken off the parish register.

However, on October 28, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI by motu proprio, *Omnium in Mentem*, removed from the Code of Canon Law all possibilities for baptized Catholics to defect from the Catholic faith by a formal act. Hitherto, some Catholics often would defect for various reasons, including rejection of church doctrines or that they no longer wanted church donation envelop in protest against sexual abuse scandal or for intentions to go re-marry and not have to go through the annulment process or even priests wanting to leave the ministry so as to be free to marry.

This is no longer possible. Baptism makes one a member of the Catholic Church (see Catechism of the Catholic Church # 1267) and once baptized you become a Catholic forever and subject to the laws of the church. Since 2009, it is no longer possible to defect by a formal act. One may stop attending Mass but one cannot annul their Catholic Baptism. Once a Catholic always and forever a Catholic. Even excommunication does not remove one from being Catholic. It simply means you can no longer receive the sacraments (e.g., Holy Communion) until the excommunication is lifted.

Thus, if a Catholic were to file an application for defection from the Catholic Church, their names would still be left in the Baptismal registers of their parish and diocese. Also, if they intend to marry in a Catholic ceremony or intend to be married to a Catholic man/woman, they would still be subjected to the laws of the Catholic Church on marriage because, once baptized a Catholic, always a Catholic. And when they die, they would still have a right to a Catholic funeral.

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he would answer them in our Sunday Bulletins.