

## Why We Need Catholic Fiction

Faith-filled fiction has the potential to be a powerful instrument in helping one grow in faith. Stories imitate the way our brains work, but they also help us consider new ideas and grow in empathy, and they can remind us of important things. Let me explain.

- **First, stories are the basic way we make sense of our world.** Unconsciously, our brains organize the sensory data we receive all day, every day, in essentially the same form as a story. In a story, events unfold one after the other. There is a connection of cause and effect. There is meaning. And that's exactly how we think. This is also one reason stories appeal to us. Our brains are wired that way. Reading a story puts our whole brain to work too, activating not only the language processing parts of our brain but also other areas that we use when experiencing events.
- **Second, stories help us consider new ideas.** Through the pages of a dystopian, mystery, or contemporary fiction we get to explore the meaning of events, emotions, challenges, and suffering. We naturally relate the story to our own experiences, but then we gain new or deeper perspectives. Teachers and parents use stories all the time when helping their children to grasp new ideas, understand feelings, or show the path to overcoming obstacles. Stories help children understand the "why" of things. But it's even true for teens and adults because that's how our brains work!
- **Third, a faith-filled story can shine a light on truth.** Can we misunderstand the events and trials in our life? Absolutely! Remember when the disciples saw a man blind from birth and they asked Jesus who sinned, this man or his parents. Neither one of those ideas were right. The disciples jumped to the wrong conclusion and Jesus corrected them, saying, "neither, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."
- When faced with disappointments and failure, it is easy to become cynical or negative toward God or about life. Even when we receive blessings, we can become self-involved or more focused on the gift than the giver. But faith-filled stories can help move us to the truth about crosses and blessings and point us to God's purposes for everything.
- **Additionally, stories can help us gain empathy.** They put us inside the minds of the characters and let us see the world through their eyes. We can see another's struggle, goals, and the reasons behind choices—good or bad. Through stories with realistic characters, readers can explore human nature and relationships, with both their flaws and virtues. A good story speaks to us about who we are as human persons.

- **Next, stories can provide reminders.** We need reminders. We live in a busy world. Our days are filled with obligations and commitments. Even when we are trying to be responsible and make the right choices, it's still easy to lose focus on spiritual goals and perspective.
- The US Bishops have said that the first goal of adult faith formation is to “invite and enable ongoing conversion to Jesus in holiness of life.” Conversion is not a one-time thing. It's a lifelong process. Every day we are faced with temptation and challenges. Every day we are called again to turn away from sin and to choose Christ (CCC 1427-28). No matter our age, we need to “reflect on the meaning of God's revelation” in our lives so that we can grow closer to God. **Good literature can help us to take this ongoing conversion seriously**, to inspire us to face our challenges with a Christian spirit, to encourage us in evangelization, and to remind us of the most important things that we often overlook because we can't see—with our eyes, that is—the object of our faith.
- Without all the reasons I just gave, we know fiction can be instrumental in deepening our faith because **Jesus preached with parables**. And the entire Bible is packed full of stories that are meant to help us grow in faith.
- Because we seek meaning in our own lives, faith-filled stories can be powerful instruments in the life of faith.

I hope that every book I write is an instrument for helping my readers to grow in faith. *Roland West, Outcast*, the next book in my West Brothers teen fiction series comes out November 17. This story brings Catholic truth to some difficult issues and leaves readers with a challenge. Today's culture is screaming at us, telling us that we are judgmental if we believe in moral truth and telling us to keep our Christian views to ourselves. But Jesus wants our light to shine. He wants us to share the Gospel with the whole world, including those who disagree. So in this story, Roland West, who is incredibly shy and never wants to draw attention to himself, finds himself ridiculed and challenged about his beliefs. His best friend is counting on him to find out who's responsible for vandalizing an outcast's house. Once Roland discovers the sinister reason behind the vandalism, he must overcome his fear of speaking out to confront and expose the perpetrators. This story is meant to encourage Christian teens—we belong to the Church that Jesus built and it has the full deposit of the faith. And this story is meant to challenge them. If we really care about others, we've got to share the truth in love. We are called to be countercultural.