



Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

The *Catechism*: Not Just a Reference Book

This year marks the 25th Anniversary of the *Catechism* of the Catholic Church. It is quite an incredible gift from the Church as we have everything that we believe gathered together in one place. Regarding the contents, there is a significant image on the cover of the *Catechism*, carefully chosen, to let us know what is contained inside this large book. It is a window looking inside to see **Christ, the Good Shepherd** Who leads and protects His faithful (represented by the lamb) Who teaches us by His authority (represented by the staff) and, because of His love and compassion, He draws us by the melodious symphony of the truth (represented by the panpipes - a musical instrument played by blowing across the top of a row of short pipes) and makes us lie down in the shade of the tree of life, His redeeming Cross which opens paradise.



Through the years I have heard people downplay the *Catechism* by saying it is not meant to be read, but just kept on a shelf for a reference book. I had the opportunity to read a few pages a day and over several months read the *Catechism* cover-to-cover. There was a transformation that took place in me, which I think will happen to anyone who reads through the *Catechism*. How could it not? God is at the heart of every paragraph.

Please know that I set out organizing this schedule to read through the *Catechism* – just to get this done. Further, I also thought that the *Catechism* was just a nice reference book, probably realistically, to me anyway, a bit dull and boring, and so I really did not know what I was getting myself into.

Each day at the planned time, I prayed a simple prayer to the Holy Spirit, asking Him to help me understand what I was reading and to allow everything I learned to deepen my friendship with Jesus Christ, so to love Him more. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit answered that prayer. In addition, something in particular grabbed my

attention each day and I would continue to ponder it after the committed time. And if there was a word that I did not comprehend completely, the glossary in the back was extremely helpful.

What is significant here is that I experienced reading the *Catechism* cover to cover not as a purely academic read. The transformation of my mind and heart came by way of prayerfully reading the *Catechism*, by pondering the truths in the paragraphs for that day, and then speaking to the Lord about this.

During those months of prayerfully reading three pages per night, there were noticeable effects in my life. In moving through the *Catechism*, one overarching theme stood out for me: union with God. It seemed to come up over and over again. Here is a brief summary of what I mean:

- God is a communion of Persons of complete self-giving love.
- We are created for union with God.
- We lost union through the Original Sin of Adam and Eve.
- Jesus restored union with the Blessed Trinity by establishing one Church and instituting the seven Sacraments.
- We call this union – this intimate communion with Jesus Christ – sanctifying grace – in which God dwells in our soul, giving us His divine Life.
- Our life is about being prepared for the perfect union with God in Heaven. Wow!

This is incredible – the Creator of the entire universe desires to be united with me – and each person.

The first effect on my life flowed from this understanding. God’s desire for union helped me to realize better His Fatherly love. At times, I would question how Jesus can love me, and every person, so much. He can’t stop loving us, giving us

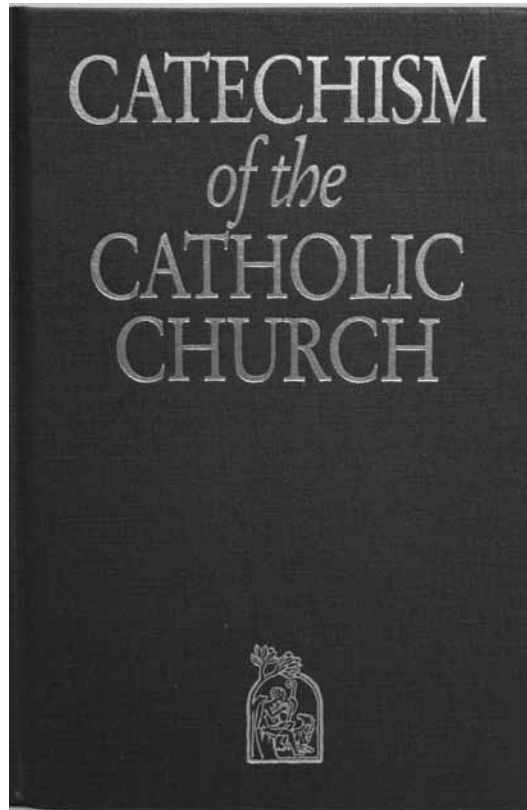
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everything that we need to become who He created us to be. Through this more profound understanding of God's love, I was led to open my heart, in a much deeper way, and receive further healing and fall more deeply in love with Him.

The second effect on my life was to recognize more clearly my dignity as a child of God. The section on Life in Christ was fascinating, to see how it developed in an orderly progression: how God created us in His image and likeness, with a soul that will live forever, and how He placed within the human heart the desire for happiness, which He alone can fulfill. How God endowed us with freedom and responsibility, a moral conscience, and gifted us with the gifts of faith, hope and charity and Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit so that we can live in relationship with Him as His children. What else do we need? He has given us everything.

And as I read the last section on Christian prayer, many days I was drawn to my knees to thank Jesus for loving us with His infinite and perfect love, in spite of our sin. I made it my goal to express my gratitude toward Christ by seeking to grow in virtues such as patience, docility, gentleness and humility. With the help of His grace, I have made some progress.



Another effect was that in prayerfully pondering each part of the *Catechism*, the gift of interior joy increased in my heart. Of course the struggles and worries of daily life can be overwhelming, but recently I started to read the *Catechism* again, and the Truth of our Faith confirms for me every day that life is hard but God is good.

This very positive conversion experience led to an unexpected opportunity in which a Program was developed of leading others to read the *Catechism* from cover-to-cover over a 38 week time period. What that looks like specifically is reflective reading for 5 nights a week, 15 paragraphs per night (roughly 3 pages) that takes about 10-15 minutes. Participants receive an email every two weeks.

I would like to strongly encourage you to read the *Catechism* from start to finish. A few paragraphs each night is solid spiritual food for the soul. Let each of us discover the “inexhaustible riches of the faith” as spelled out in an understandable way in the *Catechism*. A great time will be during the **150th year celebration of the founding of our Diocese**. Further information will be forthcoming, with a start date of the week of Ash Wednesday. What better time to reflect on our relationship with Jesus Christ and the truth that has been handed on to us from our forefathers/mothers?

*By Ann Lankford
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