

Holiness and Mission Column for October 2017 *The Long Island Catholic Magazine*.

Seven Reasons to Celebrate our Catholic Faith on the 25th Anniversary
of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

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The Church's celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its impact on the New Evangelization and the mission of the Church gives us occasion to celebrate seven dimensions of our Catholic Faith that are expressed by the *Catechism*.

1) Celebrate the Catechism's Emphasis on the Catholic Truth of the Deposit of Faith

In the very first sentence of the Apostolic Constitution *Deposit of Faith*, St. John Paul II writes: "Guarding the Deposit of Faith is the Mission which the Lord entrusted to His Church." The apostles entrusted the 'Sacred deposit' of the faith, contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, to the whole of the Church. (CC 84)

Jesus Christ, the Unique Redeemer of the World, for all peoples, for all cultures, for all moments in history, gave us the gift of the objective Truth of the Deposit of Faith. These objective truths keep us grounded in the Mind and Heart of Christ as we experience the changing events and seasons of World History.

The Deposit of Faith was complete with the death of the last Apostle and yet the Holy Spirit helps us to understand more deeply as time goes on the essential truths of this Deposit of Faith.

Our understanding that the Splendor of Catholic Truth expressed in the Deposit of Faith moves through every age of history is a liberating truth. The Deposit of Faith helps us to be courageous in truth and charity against the injustices and moral tragedies of history which are so often today the expression of what Pope Benedict XVI called "the dictatorship of relativism."

Our lives as Catholics are daily expressions of the Deposit of Faith. The truths of the Deposit of Faith help us, in the words of Pope Francis, "to transform the world and history" with Christ's love and mission.

2) Celebrate the Catechism of the Catholic Church as a Celebration of the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council

St. John Paul II makes it clear that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is an expression and application of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. He writes that "Vatican II has always been...the constant reference point of my every pastoral action, in the conscious commitment to implement its directives concretely and faithfully at the level of each Church and the whole Church."²

Every one of the four parts of the *Catechism* draws richly on the teaching documents of the Second Vatican Council and helps apply the teaching of the Council in the catechetical and evangelizing mission of the Church.

3) *Celebrate that the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls us to be Biblically Passionate Catholics*
The *Catechism* celebrates that “the Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord’s Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one Table of God’s Word and Christ’s Body. In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, ‘but as what it really is, the word of God.’” (103-104)

The *Catechism* is a biblical Catechism rich in biblical passages and biblical theology, rich in its call to us to be passionately biblical Catholics.

Our faith only grows and expands when we are deeply and passionately biblical. It grows as we read the Bible regularly, prayerfully and in harmony with the Universal Church and the Magisterium which is the Servant of the Word of God in its authoritative role of interpretation. The Sacred Scriptures are the soul of Catholic theology, prayer and life. The more we read and pray them the more we grow in our understanding and love for our faith.

4) *Celebrate that the Catechism of the Catholic Church helps us to be nourished and inspired by the witness and teaching of the Fathers, Doctors, Saints and Martyrs of the Church*

Every one of the four parts of the *Catechism* is enriched by the wisdom of the Fathers, Doctors and Saints of the Church. The lives, writings and teachings of the saints are a breath of prayer that circulates throughout the *Catechism*.

Their joyful presence in the *Catechism* is a reminder that the content is not only meant to be read, studied, taught and prayed but it is meant to be lived. The saints show us that it can be lived.

5) *Celebrate that every paragraph of the Catechism can be used for Mental Prayer*

A Jesuit priest, Fr. Gerald Blaszcak, S.J., the co-director of *The Center for Ignatian Spirituality of Fairfield University*, stated in a January 2017 retreat he gave to the Bishops of New York that a reader of the *Catechism* could pick up any paragraph in any section of the *Catechism* and use it for mental prayer.

It is something I have always believed and the observation shows why the *Catechism* is a masterpiece in Church history. It reaches not only the realm of Faith, Reason and the Intellect, but it reaches the heart, the imagination and the soul. In so doing, it reflects a pedagogy that is guided by a holistic approach to anthropology, and a holistic approach to the human person.

6) *Celebrate that the Catechism in its many cross-references shows that the Splendor of Truth is Synthetic and Harmonious*³

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis emphasizes that “each truth (of our Catholic faith) is better understood when related to the harmonious totality of the Christian message; in this context all the truths are important and illumine one another.” (39)

The symphonic truths of our four parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are not only mutually illuminating but mystically cross-referenced.

The *Catechism* so often celebrates how the Creed and Catholic dogmatic theology guides Catholic Spiritual Theology and the experience of prayer. The *Catechism* so often celebrates the symphony between Catholic sacramental theology and Catholic Social Justice teaching and the sanctity of human life.

Discovering the beautiful connections and symphonic nature of Catholic truth makes our study and prayer of the *Catechism* an adventure of faith.

7) *Celebrate the Organic Structure of the Catechism and its Role in the New Evangelization*

In his 1994 Laurence J. McGinley lecture entitled “The Challenge of the Catechism,” Avery Cardinal Dulles writes: “The Catechism sets forth the whole body of Catholic teaching in an organic manner. It is a serene, comprehensive presentation of the authoritative teaching of Scripture and Catholic tradition, systematically distributed in four parts dealing respectively with the creed, the sacraments, Christian conduct, and prayer. These parts are broken down into familiar divisions: the twelve articles of the creed, the seven sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the seven petitions of the Our Father. The Catechism as a whole is a magnificent panorama, breathtaking in its scope.”¹

¹ “The Challenge of the Catechism” in *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures 1988-2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 163.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a Compass for the New Evangelization. It also prepares the ground for deeper theological study and reflection and deeper prayer.

It is a critical and providential tool for New Evangelizers pursuing *dramatic missionary growth* on Long Island and around the world.

I encourage every Catholic not only to obtain a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* but to begin to read it and pray it.

The *Catechism* is not something that can be read in one, or ten, or 100 sittings. Instead it should generally be read in small bites and in the context of the biblical passages it constantly cites.

You will find that it sometimes takes work, but that will be work that will help you more deeply understand and appreciate our Catholic faith and how Christ wants us to live our lives.

And, as you read, study and pray the *Catechism*, ask yourself how you too can evangelize and catechize others with its content, how you too can be an instrument of *dramatic missionary growth* through your holiness and your missionary spirit.