

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 1

The Catechism prepares us to meet Jesus

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In many of my contributions, and in my books, I have continually said that the current crisis affecting the Church and the world is radically a spiritual crisis, that is, a crisis of faith. The modern world has denied Christ. We are experiencing the mystery of betrayal, the mystery of Judas. Above all, we Catholics have removed God from our life. We have abandoned prayer, Catholic doctrine is called into question. The relativism that reigns in

the world has entered the Church with force.

The Sunday celebration, the day of the Lord's Eucharist, a moral precept which obliges us to render an external, visible, public and regular worship to God in remembrance of His universal benevolence towards men (CC 2176-2177) is much neglected or celebrated in theatrical and superficial way.

The answer to this situation does not lie in taking things into our own hands or in our effort to try to purify the Church by our own strength. We reform the Church when we start by changing ourselves. Gesù thirsts for unity. And the unity of the Church has its source in the heart of Jesus Christ. We must stay close to it, in it.

As I have already written in *The Day is Now Spent*, the unity of the Church rests on four columns: Prayer, Catholic doctrine, love for Peter, and mutual charity. Without prayer, without union with God every attempt to strengthen the Church and the faith will be in vain. But, as the *Daily Compass* introduces this new initiative of catechism lessons, I would like to dwell on the meaning of Catholic doctrine.

The source of our unity precedes us and is offered to us: it is the Revelation we have received which reads as follows: "The brothers were assiduous in listening to the teaching of the Apostles and in fraternal union, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Att. 2,42). We must be faithful to this and the Christian people have the right to a clear, firm and sure teaching. The unity of faith presupposes the unity of the Magisterium in time and space. When a new teaching is given to us, it must always be interpreted in a way consistent with the earlier teaching.

Faith is altogether an intimate, personal, interior act and an adherence to an objective content that we did not choose. Through faith, we personally make an act by which we decide to rely totally on God in full freedom. I believe: by this act, the heart, the authentic sanctuary of the person, opens up under the influence of grace to the objective content that God reveals, to which we give our assent. The faith blossoms into public witness, because our belief can never remain purely private. The faith can be professed only in the Church, with the Church, which hands on to us the integral knowledge of the mystery, of the contents that are to be known and believed.

Sadly, the relativism which dominates the world has entered deeply into the Church. But making faith a purely personal feeling renders it incommunicable, cuts it off from the Church, and, above all, empties it of all content. It is therefore urgent to insist on the teaching of the catechism both to adults and to children. Teaching the catechism

is more than an intellectual knowledge of its contents. It promotes a true encounter with Jesus, who revealed these truths to us. As long as we have not encountered Jesus physically, we are not really Christians.

Today some contrast teaching and experience. But the experience of God can be had only through teaching: "How are they to believe in him... without a preacher?", Saint Paul asks (Rom 10:14-15). This failure of catechism leads a great many Christians to support a sort of vagueness concerning the faith. Some choose to believe one article of the Creed and reject another. Some go so far as to take surveys about the adherence of Catholics to the Christian faith. The faith is not a merchant's stall where we go to select whatever fruits and vegetables we like. In receiving it, we receive God whole and entire, His Word, His Doctrine, His Teaching.

Let us love our catechism. If we receive it not only with our lips but with our heart, then, through the formulas of the faith, we will truly enter into communion with God. It is time to snatch Christians from the surrounding relativism that anesthetizes hearts and puts love to sleep. Henri de Lubac added: "If heretics no longer horrify us today, as they once did our forefathers, is it certain that it is because there is more charity in our hearts? Or would it not too often be, perhaps, without our daring to say so, because the bone of contention, that is to say, the very substance of our faith, no longer interests us?... Consequently, then, heresy no longer shocks us; at least, it no longer convulses us like something trying to tear the soul of our souls away from us... It is not always charity, alas, which has grown greater, or which has become more enlightened; it is often faith, the taste for the things of eternity, which has grown less".

It is time for the faith to become for Christians their most intimate, most precious treasure. Think of all the martyrs who died for the purity of their faith at the time of the Arian crisis: because they professed that the Son is not only similar to the Father but of one substance with him, how many bishops, priests, monks, and simple believers suffered torture and death! What is at stake is our relationship with God, not just some theological quarrels. You can gauge by our apathy regarding doctrinal deviations the lukewarmness that has set in among us.

We must burn with love for our faith. We must not tarnish it or dilute it in worldly compromises. We must not falsify or corrupt it. It is a matter of the salvation of souls: ours and those of our brethren.

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