Roman Catechism Series

Part Two

The Roman Catechism: Studying Our Faith from a Trusted Source

An Indulged Practice, Vital for Our Times

Editor's Note: *CFN* is excited to re-introduce this series which covers the entire Roman Catechism. This series was first presented in earlier editions of the monthly paper. The author, Mr. Matthew Plese, is a traditional Third Order Dominican who resides in Chicago, IL. After entering the Church with his family in 2004 as a high school freshman, he went on to earn degrees in Business and Philosophy as well as a Certificate in Catechesis from the Catholic Distance University. Since 2010, Mr. Plese has served as the president of CatechismClass.com, an online apostolate devoted to providing top-quality sacramental preparation and other religious education resources for individual and parish use. Readers can follow Mr. Plese online by visiting his blog, *A Catholic Life* http://www.acatholiclife.blogspot.com

His book on the Catechism: Link

By Matthew Plese

Learning our Religion: A Commandment for the Modern Catholic

"For there is no other Name [than Jesus] under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved" (Act 4:12), and yet, how many of us feel a pull on our hearts because of it? How about when we hear St. Paul remind us elsewhere: "How then shall they call on Him, in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe Him, of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). How often do we think about the vast numbers of souls who die each day? How many go to hell? Do we ever think to ourselves, "Is there anything that I can do to stop it?"

We live in a state of complete moral collapse and deterioration in Catholic belief. Rather than opening the Church up to better confront and guide the modern Catholic, Vatican II and its aftermath have led to a continual downward spiral in Catholic belief. Average Catholics should feel grief in their own souls as they see more Catholics fall away from the Faith and reject the one means given to us to be saved – Holy Mother Church.

Since 1970, according to data analyzed from USCCB records, the number of students in religious education has decreased by 60%, adult baptisms have fallen by 68%, and the

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annual number of infant baptisms has fallen by 18%. Furthermore, according to Sherry Weddell's research published in *Forming Intentional Disciples* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), only 30% of Americans who were raised Catholic still practice the Faith, and 10% of all adults in the United States are fallen-away Catholics.

In our modern age, it is easy to become distracted with the use of technology, the day-to-day responsibilities of life, and the physical demands placed on us each day. How often do we step back and *actually* pray? Do we truly try to go to daily Mass, recite part of the Divine Office, get in our daily Rosary, or practice thirty minutes of mental prayer a day?

Do we at least keep all things in perspective and ensure that we are spending adequate time each day in practicing the Catholic Faith? Our Lord Himself affirmed, "Heaven and earth shall pass, but My words shall not pass" (Matt. 24:35), yet modern man acts as if religion is a fable or at best something that, while true for some, applies to others and not himself. We will all die. We will all be judged on our Faith. And unbeknownst to the modern Catholic is the reality that neglecting the Sacraments and neglecting our faith formation and that of our children is a serious sin.

Religious education is not an obligation for children alone. It is our responsibility as adults to continue learning our Faith in order to live it out and spread it. Our Lord Himself observed the Jewish law to the letter and affirmed that He had come to perfect, not abolish, the law (cf. Matt. 5:17). And the law of charity imposes on us who have been given the grace to be Catholic the responsibility to spread the Faith, to admonish sinners, to instruct the ignorant, to raise children in the Catholic Faith, and to be a role model to others. As King David exclaimed in the Psalms, "O how have I loved Thy law, O Lord! it is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 118:97). But, do we *really* love the Lord's law? Do we love it enough to set down the television remote, the football, and our other comforts in order to pick up a copy of the Roman Catechism or the Lives of the Saints?

The world and the Church herself are in a state of unprecedented crisis, a crisis that is greatly exacerbated by the average lay Catholic failing to understand his religion. It was only a few decades ago that the illustrious Archbishop Fulton Sheen remarked: "Who is going to save the Church? Not our Bishops, our priests and religious. It is up to the laity. You have the minds, the eyes, the ears to save the Church. Your mission is to see that your priests act like priests, your bishops act like bishops and your religious act like religious."[1] But if he were on this earth today, I suspect he would weep for how little those in the Church seem to care about true doctrine.

The Divine Remedy of Christian Doctrine

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Despite modern man's propensity to forget the souls in purgatory and the reality of our certain death and our encounter with Our Lord as Judge, these truths exist independent of our awareness of them. In fact, if modern man were to step back and examine the amount of time he puts into mundane (or even commendable) earthly endeavors that pass away, he would weep. Why do we place so much time into thinking of tomorrow, or our next vacation, or our future jobs, or our retirement plans? And yet, all of us will one day stand before the Just Judge Who knows the hidden sins of our life and will judge us for every last omission and action. Why do we resist planning for a certain death and ensuring that we are prepared to stand before the Supreme Arbiter of our eternal destiny?

Despite Protestant attacks on purgatory and indulgences, both the former and the latter are real and should thus be taken seriously. Specifically regarding indulgences, Holy Mother Church teaches, "The faithful who devote twenty minutes to a half hour to teaching or studying Christian Doctrine may gain: an indulgence of 3 years. The indulgence is plenary on the usual conditions twice a month, if the above practice is carried out at least twice a month." The Enchiridion of Indulgences maintained this Raccolta indulgence as meriting a partial indulgence.

The Church not only bestows upon parents the responsibility to educate their children, but She offers all the faithful involved in learning and teaching religious doctrine the remission of temporal punishment due to sins. How truly generous Holy Mother Church is! Many times, when we are given an obligation and we perform, we do not receive a great reward for doing our duty. But in this instance, we are given, for the performance of this duty, the partial remission of the temporal punishment due to our sins.

Teaching Christian Doctrine is also a forgotten spiritual work of mercy. Indeed, the first three of the seven spiritual works of mercy have at their core the transmission of true doctrine: instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, and admonishing the sinner. Not everyone is considered capable or obligated to perform the first three spiritual works of mercy if they do not have proper tact, knowledge or training to do so. Yet, in our crisis, Holy Church is calling to arms those Catholics who are committed to learning and defending her teachings.

Far from being a novelty, the responsibility of all the Church's members to teach the Sacred Deposit of the Faith dates to the very beginning of the Church, far before the time of either Vatican II or Pope John Paul II. His Holiness Pope Leo XIII's *Sapientiae Christianae* (Jan. 10, 1890) explained the necessity of all Catholics to help spread the Faith quite clearly:

"Now, faith, as a virtue, is a great boon of divine grace and goodness; nevertheless, the objects themselves to which faith is to be applied are scarcely known in any other way than

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through the hearing. 'How shall they believe Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? Faith then cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.' [Rom. 10:14] Since, then, faith is necessary for salvation, it follows that the word of Christ must be preached. The office, indeed, of preaching, that is, of teaching, lies by divine right in the province of the pastors, namely, of the bishops whom 'the Holy Spirit has placed to rule the Church of God.' [Acts 20:28] It belongs, above all, to the Roman Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ, established as head of the universal Church, teacher of all that pertains to morals and faith.

No one, however, must entertain the notion that private individuals are prevented from taking some active part in this duty of teaching, especially those on whom God has bestowed gifts of mind with the strong wish of rendering themselves useful. These, so often as circumstances demand, may take upon themselves, not, indeed, the office of the pastor, but the task of communicating to others what they have themselves received, becoming, as it were, living echoes of their masters in the faith. **Such co-operation on the part of the laity has seemed to the Fathers of the [First] Vatican Council so opportune and fruitful of good that they thought well to invite it.** 'All faithful Christians, but those chiefly who are in a prominent position, or engaged in teaching, we entreat, by the compassion of Jesus Christ, and enjoin by the authority of the same God and Savior, that they bring aid to ward off and eliminate these errors from holy Church, and contribute their zealous help in spreading abroad the light of undefiled faith.' [Const. *Dei Filius*] **Let each one, therefore, bear in mind that he both can and should, so far as may be, preach the Catholic faith by the authority of his example, and by open and constant profession of the obligations it imposes.** In respect, consequently, to the duties that bind us to God and the Church, it should be borne earnestly in mind that in propagating Christian truth and warding off errors the zeal of the laity should, as far as possible, be brought actively into play."[2] (nn. 15-16, emphasis added)

In fact, the Blessed Mother's apparition to Adele Brise in Champion, Wisconsin in 1859 further affirmed the need to teach the Catechism.[3] Under the title of Our Lady of Good Help, the Blessed Virgin said to Adele, "Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation. Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross, and how to approach the Sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing. I will help you."[4]

The Church needs us. We are being called to live radically Catholic lives grounded in the eternal truths of the Faith. The idea that Catholic dogma can change and that what was once true is no longer true is entirely and unequivocally false. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (cf. Heb. 13:8). If the Church believed in the unity of the

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Trinity, the sinlessness of Mary, the necessity of Baptism, the evil of divorce, and more in times past, those truths remain valid today. While certain disciplines can change like the exact date of feast days or the color of vestments, dogmas of faith and morals cannot change by definition.

Pope St. Pius X upheld the immutability of the Deposit of Faith by including the following in his list of condemned propositions (July 3, 1907): "Christ did not teach a determined body of doctrine applicable to all times and all men, but rather inaugurated a religious movement adapted or to be adapted to different times and places" (*Lamentabili Sane*, n. 59).[5] Some months later, he promulgated his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* against the heresy of Modernism (Sept. 8, 1907), providing a more thorough exposition and refutation of what he defined as "the synthesis of all heresies" (n. 39).[6] And finally, on Sept. 1, 1910, St. Pius X instituted the Oath Against Modernism, requiring every bishop, priest, religious superior, seminarian, and professor of Theology or Philosophy to publicly and solemnly affirm, among other vital points, "I entirely reject the heretical misrepresentation that dogmas evolve and change from one meaning to another different from the one which the Church held previously."[7]

In our doctrinal confusion today, clarity is desperately needed. What exactly is the Faith? What is the true doctrine of Christ? Thankfully, there is a resource for us and that resource is none other than the Roman Catechism.

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The Roman Catechism, A Trusted Source

Known as the "Roman Catechism," the "Catechism of St. Pius V," and also the "Catechism of the Council of Trent," this book has fallen into extreme disuse. In fact, the word "catechism" today is often used only in reference to the post-conciliar *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, originally published by Pope John Paul II in 1992. Sadly, however, this modern catechism fails in many respects: its verbose language, its frequent references to the novelties of Vatican II as opposed to actual dogmatic works, and the recent errors promulgated by Pope Francis in regard to capital punishment. In fact, the number of religious education programs that feel they must teach children from this catechism is frightening – no young child could attempt to learn from a text that is best suited for an undergraduate or master's course. So why do we either water down the Faith or teach children that the only true source of doctrine is the 1992 text?

Unbeknownst to many, the new catechism is far from the only catechism. St. Peter Canisius, who was instrumental in fighting Protestantism in Germany, wrote the first catechism in 1555 known as the "Catechism of St. Peter Canisius." Less than a decade later in 1562, the Roman Catechism was commissioned by the Fathers of the Council of Trent, who saw the need for an authoritative explanation of the Faith for the universal Church. Prepared under St. Charles Borromeo's supervision and issued by Pope St. Pius V in 1566, it remains the

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most authoritative catechism in print.

The notion that the title “Catechism” belongs exclusively to the 1992 text promulgated by Pope John Paul II is absurd. In fact, as the crisis in the Church deepened, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) commented on the failure of modern catechesis in the Church when he said in 2003, “It is evident that today religious ignorance is enormous; suffice it to speak with the new generations. Evidently, in the post-conciliar period the concrete transmission of the contents of the Christian faith was not achieved.”[8] This echoed his previous sentiments published before the New Catechism was written: “The catastrophic failure of modern catechesis is all too obvious.”[9]

For the present-day Catholic who wishes to heed the call of Pope Leo XIII to engage in true apostolic work and win souls, the New Catechism with its ambiguities and verbosity is certainly ill suited for the job. Instead, I wish to refer readers to the timeless and enduring Roman Catechism.

The Catechism itself is divided into four principal parts as stated in the introductory section of the work:

“The truths revealed by Almighty God are so many and so various that it is no easy task to acquire a knowledge of them, or, having done so, to remember them so well as to be able to explain them with ease and readiness when occasion requires. Hence our predecessors in the faith have very wisely reduced all the doctrines of salvation to these four heads: The Apostles’ Creed, the Sacraments, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.

The part on the Creed contains all that is to be held according to Christian faith, whether it regard the knowledge of God, the creation and government of the world, or the redemption of man, the rewards of the good and the punishments of the wicked. The part devoted to the Seven Sacraments teaches us what are the signs, and, as it were, the instruments of grace. In the part on the Decalogue is described whatever has reference to the law, whose end is charity [1 Tim. 1:5]. Finally, the Lord’s Prayer contains whatever can be the object of the Christian’s desires, or hopes, or prayers. The exposition, therefore, of these four parts, which are, as it were, the general heads of Sacred Scripture, includes almost everything that a Christian should learn.”[10]

Illuminated by a deep and enduring desire to save souls from error while at the same time intent on imitating Our Lord and observing His Commandments, I am honored to begin what will be a series of reflections in approximately 40 parts – one per month – until we cover in detail the timeless doctrines as explained in the Roman Catechism.

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Next month, we will treat an overview of the Creed, the necessity of Faith, and the unity of Faith.

St. Charles Borromeo, pray for us!

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"He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?" (John 21:17)

Habemus Papam
Pope Leo XIV

By Murray Rundus

On May 8, 2025, around 6 p.m. in Rome, crowds began gradually leaving St. Peter's Square. We had been expecting white smoke from the Sistine Chapel, if there was to be any, around 30 minutes earlier, as that is when the Vatican Press Office had told us was the latest approximate time for smoke to appear. It would seem that the Conclave was to move into a fifth round of voting, the same number of votes that it took for Pope Francis to be elected. After filming a short video explaining the number of votes it took, and how this could mean we would see a long conclave that everyone was anticipating, there was a roar from the crowd. As I looked behind me, there was white smoke; a new Pope had been elected. Later in the day than anticipated, but after only four rounds of voting, the number it took to swiftly elect Pope Benedict XVI, the Cardinals managed to elect Pope Leo XIV. There was an initial optimism in the air as it was announced that Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost would be Pope. Some saw him as a complete unknown, but we had reported just that week that he was a likely top-three contender. The Pope came out onto the loggia in the red mozzetta, a tradition neglected by Pope Francis, and immediately he proclaimed the words of the Risen Christ, emphasizing the true and historical nature of the Resurrection but also imploring the crowd to take up a more fervent dedication to Our Lady, all accompanied by his blessing and a plenary indulgence.

What worried me then, and what still worries me, is that the traditional media would fall into what I called at the time a "vibes-based analysis," one based more on emotion than reality itself. This reality showed that the result of this conclave proved that this kind of emotional or instinctual analysis was extremely faulty. Already moving into the Conclave, there were many who were saying they predicted Cardinal Parolin would become Pope because of a feeling of impending doom. Many respectable journalists in Rome only had that much to offer! Those who had been studying the Conclave, in this period of history where we know practically everything about each of the Cardinal electors, knew that Parolin had fallen into disfavor due to the scandals of the China deal, property agreements, and general discontent with his job as Secretary of State. We also knew that the College was relatively more conservative than was being reported, with many of the Cardinals selected by Pope Francis being selected for their identity as being located on the peripheries rather than for their ideological position.[1] This, combined with a number of reports from those who knew the Cardinals well, allowed Vatican analysts, including those of us at *Catholic Family News*, to accurately assess that Cardinal Prevost was indeed a likely contender.



Reading Pope Leo XIV

I believe it to be very important, especially for lay people involved in the traditional movement, to be precise in their reading of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV, to avoid emotional responses, and most importantly, to insist on judging our times by clear principles applied with prudence.

The election of Pope Leo XIV has drawn a mix of cautious optimism and vehement criticism from the traditionalist world. While to me it seems the consensus is developing towards optimism, the confusion is somewhat understandable. How is one to react when the predecessor of Pope Leo destroyed many communities and actively concerned himself with disrupting the spiritual lives of so many? There is also a more practical and principled problem as there is now a mix of perspectives under the umbrella term "traditionalist" of those who recognized Pope Francis as a valid Pope and those who did not in various forms, whether saying Benedict

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[1] Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen's Address to the Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus, June 1972.

[2] http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_10011890_sapientiae-christianae.html.

[3] https://www.shrineofourladyofgoodhelp.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/decree_Shrine-of-Our-Lady-of-Good-Help-SIGNED.pdf.

[4] https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/Story/TabId/2672/ArtMID/13567/ArticleID/25087/A-Marian-apparition-site-in-our-own-backyard.aspx.

[5] http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/p10lamen.htm.

[6] http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html.

[7] http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/p10moath.htm.

[8] https://zenit.org/articles/cardinal-ratzinger-on-the-abridged-version-of-catechism/

[9] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Yes of Jesus Christ* (New York, 1991), p. 35.

[10] *Roman Catechism*, Introductory, "Division of this Catechism" (TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1982), p. 9.

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