

Catholic Catechism: Lesson 2

Here are some more gems from *Love That Never Ends: a key to the Catechism*, by DiNoia, O'Donnell, Cessario, and Cameron, Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1996.

Jesus shows us perfect obedience, the mark of perfect love. By leaving His divine privileges behind, and taking on flesh, Christ did what Adam should have done. Living love by obedience, Jesus corrects Original Sin. Thereby He saves us from all sin, even personal choices. He redeems us, if we second His motion. Consider every step of this redemption: from incarnation, 9 months in Mary's womb, birth, living 33 years with us, and passion, death, and resurrection. Each step us how to imitate Him. So Pope John Paul II said: "The whole of Christ's life was a continual teaching: his silence, his miracles, his gestures, his prayer, his love for people, his special affection for the little and the poor, his acceptance of the total sacrifice on the Cross for the redemption of the world, and his Resurrection, are the actualizations of his Word, and the fulfillment of Revelation", 36. Jesus is Revelation in act. All He does reveals. His fulfillment of God's Justice and Mercy was His death.

"It was the obedience with which He embraced the cross that was finally decisive in bringing about our salvation. His death to sin, his apparent defeat by the devil, would be revealed as a definitive victory over death and sin in his resurrection." 36 You noticed that the Gospels do not identify a single person guilty of killing Christ. Instead, everyone cooperated, reflecting that Jesus died for everyone's sins. The kicker in this is "to assign blame for His crucifixion and death to any one group is, in effect, precisely to *exclude* oneself from its benefits. Only when one, through confession and repentance, takes responsibility for bringing Christ to the cross, can one share in its victory. The sin of blaming the Jews is not just one of injustice against them; it is a sin of unrepentance which hurts the offending Christian in the very core of his own spirit, 37.

In "the commemoration of Christ's passion on Good Friday the congregation utters the ... terrible words: 'Let his blood be upon us, and upon our children' the Church is affirming its faith that only by being washed in the blood of Christ can we be freed from sin and restored to friendship with God. On Easter Sunday, when we gaze upon the risen Christ, we know that it was for *our* sins that he died, and that it was *our* sins that he defeated. We know that no sins, however great, are more powerful than the power of Christ who vanquished them. Now Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, and we await his coming in glory as Judge. The expectation of Christ's judgment should not be a terrifying prospect for us, but a liberating one. He who is victorious over sin is the only true judge. He frees us from the burden of judging others, and of judging ourselves" 37.

"As the Catechism makes clear, our own entry into the mysteries of Christ's life demands that we view everything between Christmas and the Second Coming in the light of the glory that blazes from the face of the crucified and risen Son of God", 38. That's worth reading again. It expresses the context for all that we do. If we live in the light of the risen Christ, then we join the Kingdom of God. That light, integrating knowledge and love, is the Gift of the Father, through the Son, and **is** the Holy Spirit.

The Church is communion in the Holy Spirit. Jesus claimed us, and we responded by accepting baptism, if we joined as adults, or our parents responded by baptizing us, when we were babies. As our authors express it: "we are part of the Church only because we have been claimed by Christ, and baptized in the Holy Spirit", 39. In case we forget, we were Confirmed in the Holy Spirit. This sacrament was our baptism by fire: Love manifest in the Spirit. The Three Divine Persons gift us with participation in their communal life. This grace enlivens with Christ's own life. He embodied the Trinity by His Incarnation. We participate by Church incorporation. Thus we echo the Israelites, "who were no people until you were My people", where "My" means God's.

"The Church is thus the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. 'For just as the power of Christ's sacred flesh unites those in whom it dwells into one body' wrote St. Cyril of Alexandria, 'in the same way the one and undivided Spirit of God, who dwells in all, leads all into spiritual unity'. ... In a deeply mysterious way, the Church's life reflects the life of the blessed Trinity, and indeed is a foretaste of that life", 40.

"It is especially the grace of Pentecost, and the work of the Holy Spirit 'to awaken faith in us, and to communicate to us the new life, which is to "know the Father and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ."' This new life constitutes the bond that unites the Church. Since it is the particular mission of the Holy Spirit to

preserve and nourish this life, the Church traditionally appropriates the following graces in the Holy Spirit: He inspired Scripture, preserves the tradition, assists the magisterium, puts us into communion with Christ in the sacred liturgy, interceded for us in prayer, builds up the Church through special charisms, and manifests his holiness in the lives of the saints”, 41. It should be obvious that the Trinity is the core of the Church, radiating out into details. Unfortunately, we tend to hang up on these details, missing the core. We can focus on the Trinity.

If we do, we get glimpses of the One, working as the Three. St. Irenaeus pointed us in the right direction. “It is impossible to see God’s Son without the Spirit, and no one can approach the Father without the Son, for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of God’s Son is obtained through the Holy Spirit”, 41. Yes, we must stretch into this understanding, but stretching is stimulating. While difficult, it’s more satisfactory than any alternative activity. Therefore, we realize more and more clearly that the Church is heaven on earth. It is a foretaste of heavenly activity. Contemplating the Trinity in Church liturgy warms us up for contemplating the Trinity in the Beatific Vision. That’s the Happyfying Vision, or the one that delights us perfectly.

The Catechism reminds us of forgotten sources, which meant much more back then than they do now. “The very word ‘church’ embodies the truth of its divine constitution. The Latin term *ecclesia* (based on the Greek) refers to God’s ‘calling a people together’ before Him. The English term ‘church’ (based on the German work *Kirche*) means ‘what belongs to God’. These terms reflect the truth that the Church rests in the first place on the divine initiative and grace. The Catechism quotes Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*: ‘The Father ... determined to call together in a holy Church those who should believe in Christ’”, 41.

Though divine in origin, and at its core, the Church collects men, who are sinful, even disgusting, neighbors in the pews. For many people, this tension is too much. They can’t stand the people. Like Linus, in *Peanuts*, they love humanity, but can’t stand people. In this adaptation, they love the Church, but can’t stand its members. Jesus stands us, as His earthly life manifests. Therefore, the Trinity stands us. So we strive to learn from God to love us poor humans as He does. In *Lumen Gentium*’s words: “The Church, in Christ, is ... a sacrament – a sign and instrument ... of communion with God, and of unity among all men”, 42.

As sacrament, the Church is the visible sign of invisible power to sanctify, or to unite us with God. In fact, it’s the visible sign of God Himself. This is hard for us to comprehend, but working at it is wonderful for us. It simultaneously wears us out, and builds us up in Christ. Imagine that, being exhausted and refreshed by the same activity. This is Christ-life. It goes on forever, so we lose track of this delightful life. It’s easier to observe the visible marks of the Church: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. It’s one because of the One at its core, Who, in the person of the Holy Spirit, heals our divisions. Rebels do break away, and their descendents don’t remember the rebellion, but they miss the Oneness Which the Church is.

It’s holy because of Holy Himself, Who radiates Himself to all who accept Him. We have to reject Him to avoid the Holiness He is, and the Holiness the Church is. Some people insist on rejecting God, but it’s hard work, leaving them exhausted instead of refreshed. God intends that we be refreshed. The Church is catholic because God is the Whole from which created fragments follow. Catholic means complete, or the entire event, the whole picture, the ultimate Union. With Unity Himself activating the Church, it can be no less than catholic. True, some people prefer parts, little bits they can sequester for self. But this reduced ration starves them. God wants them to enjoy the full banquet. As the disciples said “we knew Him in the breaking of the bread”.

The Church is apostolic because God is the Great Apostle. He reaches out to all His children, urging them to accept Love. Recuperating from enemy attacks, Catholics are not exactly eager to leave their fortresses, to venture out to assist many who recently tried to kill them. If we learn from the Medieval monks, we can do the equivalent of what they did. They helped the very barbarians who killed their families. They treated them as Jesus treated His enemies. This outreach is a big change, but well worth doing. Both the wounded former enemies, and we who will be Christ to them, will be better off when we activate our apostolate.

Best of all, when we invigorate all 4 Church-marks, Christ shines more brilliantly through His Mystical Body. “Nothing makes clearer the divine origin and destiny of the Church than the confession of faith in the communion of saints, and in the mystery of Mary’s motherhood of God and of the Church. Our communion

with the holy ones who have gone before us – both those who are still being purified, and those who now share the unmediated vision of the triune God – reveals the true goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Just as Mary brought the Redeemer into the world, so does she ‘mother’ the Church in grace, through her intercession and example”, 42. Our creed expresses what we believe, by God’s gift of faith. Our willingness to accept faith may look like a great effort. But we see that it’s small, compared to the power of God’s gift. It’s like trading a trinket for a treasure. Because the treasure of faith is huge, we focus on one gem at a time. When we try to see all the treasure, we often lose focus entirely. Nothing but vague images remains. We have a Catechism to help focus.