

What is the Catechism and why should I read it . . . ?

The Catechism is a popular summary of Catholic doctrine about faith and morals designed for use in passing on and teaching the faith to others. The abbreviation for the universal "Catechism of the Catholic Church" is CCC.

"The Church now has at her disposal . . . a *"sure norm for teaching the faith"* (John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Fidei Depositum*, no. 4).

What is a Catechist? One who teaches the Catholic Faith. This includes first and foremost parents, then any person committed to the formal instruction of children or adults in the practice of the faith.

Why is the Catechism important? Why should we be familiar with the CCC? For *every* Catholic, knowing our faith through determined and prayerful study is an *essential* part of sharing our faith with others. *We cannot give to others what we do not have ourselves.* The more we come to know our faith the better we can share it - and we are ALL called to share our faith.

As John Paul II says in the preface to the CCC, "an extraordinary commitment to evangelization is *urgently needed* so that everyone can know and receive the Gospel message and thus grow "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13)

This Catechism was commissioned by John Paul II because he wanted it to be *studied* and to be *used* as a practical *tool*, not just sit on a bookshelf. Like the law of Love preached by Christ Himself, the teaching of our Church on matters of faith and morals (found in this authoritative Catechism) must be written on our hearts and practiced in our lives day to day.

Let us all answer his call, which is the call of Jesus Christ, to know our faith better so as to share it more effectively with others not only in the witness of our lives, but in word and deed as well. So, **we must make the effort to pray and study** while trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit to grant the grace we need in this "labor of love."

What are the parts of the CCC ? The CCC is divided into four parts:

Part One - The Profession Of Faith - which deals primarily with Divine Revelation (how God revealed Himself to man throughout history) and the Creed.

Part Two - The Celebration Of The Christian Mystery - explains the Sacramental life of the Church. This section answers questions such as "what is a Sacrament" and explains each of the seven Sacraments of the Church and their effects.

Part Three - Life In Christ - explains the Church's teachings on the Moral Life (how each of us is called to live, to form our conscience and determine right and wrong according to the Truth that is Jesus Christ and make good decisions accordingly).

Part Four - Christian Prayer - discusses Christian prayer, its effects, its forms etc. A detailed explanation of the "Lord's Prayer" (the "Our Father") is offered.

How do I actually use the CCC? How can I find specific information in it?

Index - A simple means of illustrating how to use the CCC to find answers to specific questions on what we believe as Catholics is by looking in the index toward the back of the book. If, for example you wanted to know what the Church has to say on the topic of "Purgatory," and turned to the index you would find - **Purgatory, 1030-32. See also the Communion of Saints**

Paragraph numbers - Each paragraph of the CCC is numbered. This is the most common means of finding specific topics in the Catechism. Using the above example, you would find information on the subject of Purgatory in paragraphs 1030-1032.

The paragraph numbers which are referred to are the bold faced numbers found on virtually every page of the CCC. For example paragraph 1030 of the CCC reads:

III. THE FINAL PURIFICATION, OR PURGATORY

1030 All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.

Glossary - The glossary of the CCC is a dictionary of Catholic terms of belief and practice. Definitions in the glossary of the CCC also contain paragraph references in the CCC where more information on the topic in question may be found.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is available at the Bookstore at Ste. Marie Bookstore as well as online.

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults

Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Father McBride's Teen Catechism:

Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has an excellent online Catechism glossary. Their website is: <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/glossary.htm>

The website for St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Picayune, Mississippi contains an excellent Catechism search feature. You can simply type in the topic on which you wish information and every instance of that word or phrase in the CCC is given you to browse. Their website is: <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>