

## ***The Catechism as Opening Statement***

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In 1992, after years of planning, Pope John Paul II promulgated the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*. It took a few months for the official translation of the *Catechism* from Latin to English to be approved, and then even more time for it to be published. It was pretty much available for all who were interested by the spring of 1995.

The *Catechism* was envisioned as a comprehensive summary of the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. As such, it was intended primarily for teachers, catechists, bishops, priests, and vowed religious men and women. Basically, it was to be used by the men and women of the Church who were entrusted with the ministry of faithfully passing on the Church's beliefs, traditions, and practices to believers. It was never imagined as something that the general public would be interested in. However, the Catholic general public had a completely different idea.

Generations of Catholics, formed by the *Baltimore Catechism*, had fond memories of the old catechism and assumed that the new one would have the same usefulness. Imagine their surprise when the 264-page *Baltimore Catechism*, in its user-friendly question-and-answer format, was replaced by the 574-page CCC. A readable and familiar catechism had been, in effect, replaced by a reference text.

The difference between the two catechisms was not just in page length. The *Baltimore Catechism* was meant to be a catechetical roadmap to help ordinary Catholics navigate the faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as noted, had a narrower purpose and a much smaller audience in mind. This difference in the intent of the publishers is essential in forming a satisfying perspective and understanding.

To effectively use and understand the CCC, it is not enough to be able to read it. It is more important to be able to understand its



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full intent and context. Every word, sentence, or canon of the *Catechism* does not hold equal weight. There are dogmas, official doctrines, quotations from various sources, writings that are representative of the Church teachings, writings from the practiced traditions of the Church, and the list is endless. To simply read something from the *Catechism* and state, "This is what the *Catechism* says," may be woefully inadequate, inaccurate, and misleading.

Some of what the *Catechism* presents is historical theology. Some of what it presents reflects the thinking of systematic theologians. It also presents the musings and practiced piety of the saints. Some of it is settled tradition and practice, while other canons represent what the Church teaches about a subject now, but the theology on the matter may be unsettled. Readers err if they do not understand the nuances of what is written and instead give equal weight to everything in the book. No matter how informed they might think that they are, they are misinformed. Even worse, they are confused and misdirected.

To illustrate, think of the contents of a daily newspaper. Informed newspaper readers should know the editorial bias of its editorial board. They also need to understand that the paper's various sections are different. An editorial is not the same as a comic in the funnies, and a front-page news story is vastly different from the recap of a ballgame or a movie review. Simply stating, "This is what the newspaper says," fails to give the full story. Thus, a newspaper and our *Catechism* have commonality.

Another important point is that although the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is intended to be a comprehensive summary of Catholic belief and practice, it is deliberately incomplete. By its very nature, a summary is incomplete. The CCC does not present or pretend to present a complete statement of Catholic beliefs on sacred Scripture, moral theology, cosmology

(metaphysics), medical ethics, or current and orthodox pastoral practices in whole or in part.

That explanation should help you understand what the *Catechism* is not, but what is its intent? It is the starting point for discussion and teaching. The groundwork. The opening statement. The historical reflection. The CCC is the practiced and respected summary of some of the beliefs of the people of God in the Roman Catholic tradition.

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is a summary of  
Catholic belief, and  
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incomplete.***

All of this is an important perspective for all people who intend to reference the CCC, but it is particularly important for people with scrupulosity. Do not use the *Catechism* as your resource in trying to uncover the clarity and certitude you think you need in order to navigate the push and pull of the scrupulous condition. You will not find what you seek. At the very most, you might experience a temporary reprieve and a sense of satisfaction, but those feelings will soon be replaced with another question. Another doubt. Even more anxiety.

The *Catechism* does offer some guidance. However, there is equally important guidance available from a trusted confessor and/or spiritual director. The real authority, the convincing authority is within you because of God's manifold grace at work in your life. Answers in a book are not what you need. Rather, learn the dynamics of your scrupulosity, recognize your individual triggers, resist the isolating force of the disorder that is sustained by anxiety and fear. Learning to manage your scrupulous condition is more important than knowledge gained from any resource book. Your effort in managing your condition is the only path to real peace in real life.

Of course, keep the *Catechism* on your library shelf or tucked away in the unused files of your computer. But you do not need it to manage your scrupulous condition. ⚙

# **FOR REAL?** *Christ's Presence in the Eucharist*

**T**he Church's understanding about the Eucharist has changed little in more than 2,000 years. There has not been a single alteration in this teaching since Jesus himself shared it with his disciples.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith because Jesus Christ is the source. He is the Eucharist. We can be no nearer to God now than when we receive his completeness, his Body, Blood, soul, and divinity—in the Eucharist. God knew this, and therefore he gave us this unimaginable gift.

To give you specifics on the consistency of eucharistic teaching, I will employ the analogy of a successful four-leg relay race. The first leg begins with the teachings of Jesus on the Eucharist. Jesus then hands off the relay "baton" (teachings on the Eucharist) to the leg-two "racers," the apostles. The apostles then hand the baton that started with Jesus to those in authority who immediately followed them: the Church Fathers. Finally, the Church Fathers pass the baton to the ones who follow after them, including the Church of today.

## **Leg One: The Teachings of Jesus**

- John 6: The Bread of Life Discourse
- More than 5,000 in attendance
- Jesus says "unless you eat my flesh" four times. When referring to himself, for the word eat, he uses *trogon*, which means "to gnaw or chew."
- Many disciples left Jesus due to this teaching. Notice Jesus did not stop them to explain he was speaking symbolically because he wasn't.

## **Leg Two: The Teachings of the Apostles**

- The New Testament contains more than 125 verses linked to the Eucharist.
- Saint Paul writes about eating the bread and drinking the cup in 1 Corinthians.
- First Corinthians was written only eleven years after Jesus left earth.

## **Leg Three: The Early Church Fathers**

- Hundreds of quotations and writings from the Church Fathers support the consistent belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
- Saint Ignatius, a disciple of John the Apostle, writes in the year 107, shortly after the death of John, that he wants God's bread, which is the flesh of Christ, and Christ's blood for drink.

## **Leg Four: The Church Today**

Over the last century, a multitude of writings and formal teachings have been added to the public record to illustrate the Catholic Church's belief that, in the Eucharist: "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained. This presence is called 'real'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1374). ☼



Adapted from *For Real? Christ's Presence in the Eucharist* by Deacon Dennis Lambert, copyright © 2022 (Liguori Publications, 828539). To order, visit [Liguori.org](http://Liguori.org) or call 800-325-9521.

# Mailbox

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**Q.** *Am I responsible for the content of my dreams? It seems to me that my dreams can be very potent, full of all kinds of images and urges. Sometimes I find them upsetting and distasteful. I do not have to confess my dreams, do I?*

**A.** Absolutely not. But your dreams can teach you a valuable lesson. Just as you are not in any manner responsible for the content of your dreams because your mind freely generates each image and situation, you are also not responsible for intrusive thoughts or daydreams. Your mind is in control of all of this. You are just the witness, the observer of the creation you experience.

**Q.** *You often state that anxiety is not an indication of sin. Isn't my anxiety the direct result of my sin? Shouldn't I feel anxious about something that I have done wrong or incomplete?*

**A.** In a nutshell, your questions describe the havoc of the scrupulous disorder. If you did not have the scrupulous disorder, the anxiety that you associate with an action, thought, or experience might be very useful in your discernment. Unfortunately, because of the scrupulous disorder, you are deprived of the ability to use anxiety in a helpful way. Scrupulosity generates anxiety in any manner it can.



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