

Vatican II and the Year of Faith:
The Catechism

"Let anyone who thirsts," said Jesus, "come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me . . . Rivers of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37-38) Christ's promise is beyond imagining: faith as the doorway to untold riches, to a life welling up with beauty and joy.

This is the final goal of the Catholic Church. "My Children," write St. Paul, "for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!" (Galatians 4:19) Blessed Pope John Paul II said the same thing: "the aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity. (*Catechesi Tradendae*)

The aim of the Year of Faith is nothing less than to put people in communion with Christ. Outside of the Mass and the Holy Scriptures, we may have no better help in nurturing that intimacy than the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope Benedict has said of the *Catechism*: "On page after page, we find that what is presented here is no theory, but an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church." (*Porta Fidei*)

Both Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI considered the *Catechism* to be a fruit of the Second Vatican Council. It is the authentic reference text for understanding the Council and the teaching of the Church. It also draws on the Church's whole history of spiritual, liturgical, and theological reflection on the mystery of Christ.

Bl. John Paul II gave us *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992. Before then, nothing like the CCC had ever existed in the life of the Church. The last universal Catechism was the Roman Catechism, or the Catechism of the Council of Trent. This text was a marvelous store of wisdom and doctrine, but still quite unlike our new Catechism.

What makes the new Catechism unique is the conscious decision to draw on the widest possible expression of Catholic truth, to plumb the riches of Scripture, liturgy, devotion, spiritual writers, Popes, Councils, doctors of the Church, men, women, East and West. It is intended to be a thing of beauty - a source for prayer and faith. Cardinal Schönborn, who edited the *Catechism*, has said that the fundamental theme of the Catechism is grace: God comes to meet us in Christ; with His help, we respond in faith and love.

For the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict has asked that we rediscover the wisdom of the Second Vatican Council and the beauty of the Catechism. Let me share a few passages that illustrate the richness and beauty of the Catechism.

Citing Blessed John Paul II, the *Catechism* sets out the whole aim of catechesis as follows:

At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son from the Father. . . who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever. (CCC 426)

To explore the depth of the Church, the Catechism cites St. Augustine on our mysterious union with Christ:

Let us rejoice then and give thanks that we have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God's grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have become Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members; he and we together are the whole man.... the fullness of Christ then is the head and the members. But what does "head and members" mean? Christ and the Church. (CCC 795)

Finally, the Catechism offers St. Thérèse of Lisieux's delightful but sublime reflection on prayer:

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart;
it is a simple look turned toward heaven,
it is a cry of recognition and of love,
embracing both trial and joy. (CCC 2558)

A simple glance at the list of citations in the *Catechism* shows the incredible breadth of its wisdom. There are literally thousands of passages like these woven throughout the text. It is not a dry, academic tome, but a repository of the Church's two thousand year love affair with Jesus Christ.

Come to Jesus anew this year. Come to him in the Mass, in the sacraments, in Holy Scripture, and in the richness of the Church's tradition. Learn what rivers of living water have flown from within the heart of the Church. Read about it in the *Catechism*.