
Catechism : Foundations for Eternal Life



Sunday Catechism at St. Anthony's Chapel Singamparai under the Magister Magisterii, Mr. Xavier.

THE CATECHISM

The word *catechism* comes from the Greek word *katechizein* which means 'to teach orally or instruct by word of mouth.' The common meaning of the word is 'an instruction in the principles of Christianity using set questions and answers.' Many hundreds of different catechisms have been published since the first one (accredited to John Gerson 1363-1429), but the most influential in the English language is the *The Doway Catechism. An Abridgement of Christian Doctrine with proofs of Scripture for points controverted.*

Catechistically explained by way of question and answer, first printed at Douai in 1649. Both the *Penny Catechism* and the *Baltimore Catechism* have their roots in this catechism.

The question and (mostly) memorable answer format of these catechisms have proved so successful that they have long been the chosen primary means of imparting the Catholic faith to souls.

PRIMARY TOOL

Not all people, however, agree on the catechism's value as a teaching tool. "It's

boring," some might say. "To turn our beautiful faith into a telephone directory of dogma does it a great disservice." Indeed, it can be dry when taught badly. St. Augustine, in his treatise *De Catechizandis Rudibus* deals with both the theory and the practice of catechizing and devotes no less than five chapters to weariness! He does conclude, however, that it is usually the fault of the teacher!

What people fail to understand is that the catechism, with its structured format, gives us the building blocks from which we can construct the edifice of our faith.

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Weariness in class can happen.

con Claude Frolo holds a book in his hand and says, pointing to the book, “This will destroy that”, pointing then upwards to the Cathedral. He prophesied the destruction of the Church by the dissemination of error through the printed word. The protestant errors did indeed spread by means of the printed word launched on a population that were becoming increas-

ingly literate. The catechism was Church’s response to this threat and the catechism that we teach the children today is the Church’s continued response to an attack that has spread beyond the printed word to a dimension that Dom Claude Frolo could never have imagined.

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It is the *grammar* of the *trivium*, giving us facts and definitions by which we can judge and reason. How many of us have deepened the understanding of our faith, or answered doubts that sometimes arise spontaneously in our minds, by returning to the treasure trove of the catechism? How many of us have been forced to defend the faith and have been able to pluck, from our childhood memories, an answer that delivers the *coup de grace*? We probably did not understand many of the answers we learnt by heart as children, but the fruits of that learning manifest themselves throughout our lives.

For those whose duty it is to instruct children in the faith, it is important that same catechism is used throughout a child’s education in order to avoid confusion. Notes should be appended to answers which should increase in depth and detail as a child matures, but the basic answers should always stay the same; the success of the catechism lies in its ability to be memorised.

In Victor Hugo’s classic, *Notre Dame de Paris*, there is a scene where the spiritually tortured and ultimately doomed Archdea-



So Antoniarajam, what are the Twelve Fruits of the Holy Ghost?.