

Education & Liturgical Year

Part I - Is there a relationship?

The importance of a precise memorization of the questions and answers of the catechism escapes no traditional Catholic parent and educator. The relevance, importance and precise effect on children of following the Church's liturgical year escape not a few.

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A parent who does not succeed in teaching his children to accurately repeat the questions and answers of the catechism according to his age and abilities, must consider himself a failure as an educator, not equipping his children with the knowledge they need to face up to an unbelieving world. However, many parents make no effort to explain the cycle of the Church's year, the usage of the daily Missal and the meaning of the texts of the major feasts to be found therein, not forasmuch considering themselves culpable. There is, indeed, something very simple about the teaching of a compilation of statements and facts, of obligations and laws to be followed to get to heaven. Children will readily memorize, and are in fact drawn to the rather cold and

logical summary of religion found in the catechism, finding it "easier to practice a legalistic religion...to think of religious duty as the observance of a law rather than as the achievement of a life." (Cf. Leen, Fr. Edward, What is true education? p.179). It could hardly be otherwise, for the effort of learning by heart is much less than that required for embracing interiorly what is presented.

But who is unaware of the fact that many children who learned well their catechism, later on fall away from the practice of it? Why, if not because the catechism has not had the profound effect it ought to have had in forming the character of the adolescent who turns away from



the practice of religion. It has not captured his imagination, inspired his will, formed his way of thinking, planning, hoping and desiring in a truly pedagogical way, corresponding with his aspiration to live a life of real meaning and value. This is not the fault of the catechism, for it is not designed to do this, but rather to present a logical summary of the Faith.

Holy Mother Church's education

There is, however, a parent who does know how to form character in a truly supernatural manner, to captivate our minds and wills by immersing us in the divine drama of the work of Redemption of fallen mankind. It is Holy Mother Church, and She has her own way of instructing and drawing us into the most fundamental and sublime supernatural realities upon which our entire supernatural makeup depends; namely the divine adoption, the supernatural life of grace, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, the participation in Christ's Redemption, the Imitation of Christ, the Mystical Body through which the graces of the Redemption are applied to our souls, the Blessed Virgin, Mother of the whole redeemed race. All these truths are present in the catechism, but do not hold a particularly prominent place. Yet, they are fundamental to the Church's liturgy, and are presented to us constantly throughout the liturgical year with incredible variety, imagination and forcefulness. In this way the Church's year is truly pedagogical, and forms supernatural character, the re-living in our own selves of the mysteries of Christ's life and death, in a way that the abstract study of the catechism cannot do. All other things being equal, the child who has been taught to live and to love the liturgical cycle is much more likely to make his own these fundamental teachings of the supernatural order.

We who are in Tradition consider ourselves truly blessed to have the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to be able to assist at it every Sunday, and receive the sacraments frequently. We forget that this is not a goal, but simply the beginning of the life of grace, centered as it is around the person of Jesus Christ, which finds its fullness only when our entire day, week and year follows the cycle of mysteries presented to us by the Church. Nobody expresses this more eloquently than Pope Pius XII, in his magnificent encyclical on the Sacred Liturgy:

"Throughout the entire year, the Mass and the Divine Office center especially around the person of Jesus Christ: this arrangement is so suitably disposed that Our Savior dominates the scene in the mysteries of His humiliation, of His redemption and triumph. While the Sacred Liturgy calls to mind the mysteries of Jesus Christ, it strives to make all believers take their part in them so that the divine Head of the Mystical Body may live in all the members with the fullness of His holiness. Let the souls of Christians be like altars on each one of which a different phase of the Sacrifice, offered by the High Priest, comes to life again, as it were: - pains and tears which wipe away and expiate sin; supplication to God which pierces heaven; dedication and even immolation of oneself made promptly, generously and earnestly; and finally that intimate union by which we commit ourselves and all we have to God, in whom we find our rest; 'the perfection of religion is to imitate whom you adore'" (Cf. *Mediator Dei*, § 151 & 152).

The "average" Mass attendee could well consider this impossible to comprehend. For his contact with the liturgical year is limited to the readings at Sunday Mass, and some sacrifices during Advent and Lent, so that he can celebrate afterwards. He has not reflected on the proper chants and prayers of each Mass, and how they relate to the liturgical season, and is certainly not familiar with the antiphons and hymns in the Divine Office. He is consequently unable to relive the mysteries, from the longing and expectation of Advent, to the docility to the action of the Holy Ghost, so as to be on fire with divine love, during the season of Pentecost. If we allow this to continue to be the case with our children, they also will remain spectators, untouched and unmoved by the divine mysteries that pass them by.

Yet children are perfectly capable of being instructed in the meaning of each phase of the liturgical year. More yet, they are incredibly open to the symbolic meaning which the sacred liturgy presents to their senses, understanding by a divine intuition that Our Divine Savior's example is given that they might walk in his footsteps. The reason is that they learn through their senses, and it is through these same senses that the Liturgy adores, prays, begs and thanks the

Most Holy Trinity. Dom Marmion explains this very well:

“It is a psychological law of our nature - matter and spirit - that we should pass from the visible to the invisible. The outward elements of the celebration of the mysteries serve as rungs in a ladder whereby our souls may rise to the contemplation and love of heavenly and supernatural realities. This is, moreover, as we sing at Christmas, the dispensation of the Incarnation itself: ‘that while we acknowledge Him to be God seen by men, we may be drawn by Him to the love of things unseen’ (Preface of the Nativity)” ...Christ’s mysteries are truly not only examples, and subjects of contemplation; they are likewise sources of grace... The mysteries of Jesus are states of His Sacred Humanity; all His graces came from His Divinity in order to be communicated to His Humanity, and through His Humanity to each member of His mystical body...” (Cf. *Christ in His Mysteries*, pp. 23 & 24).

Opposing errors

In order to truly appreciate the sequence of events in the life of Christ, His Blessed Mother, and the saints, that makes up the liturgical year, we must consequently avoid two errors. The first error is to consider these events from a purely historical perspective, as something that simply happened at some time in the past, and that is consequently not particularly relevant to us. It is the error of grown ups penetrated by the scientific way of thinking, and is roundly condemned by Pope Pius XII: “Hence the Liturgical Year devotedly fostered and accompanied by the Church, is not a cold and lifeless representation of the events of the past, or a simple and bare record of a former age. It is rather Christ Himself Who is ever living in His Church” (Ib. § 165).

The opposed and modernist error is to depreciate the value of the physical events in the life of Christ, such as the poverty of the Incarnation or the bitter sufferings of the Passion, in favor of the “illusion of a higher mysticism” (Ib. § 162) or vague remembrance of a glorified Christ. It is to condemn this error (so prevalent since Vatican II) that Pope Pius XII condemns those “who have gone so far as to want to remove from the churches images of the Divine Redeemer suffering on the Cross”, (Ib.) replacing it with a risen Christ. The same could be said not only of the

abolition of crucifixes, but also of all the realistic statues and holy pictures, picturing the real life of Christ and of the saints - now so often replaced, when they even exist, by surrealistic images, that have no correspondence with reality. Children need this realistic presentation to the senses, notably of the sufferings of the Blessed Mother, the Saints and of Our Lord Himself. For without them the Incarnation, and the religion of the Incarnate Word are entirely evacuated.

Preparation

The liturgical year thus understood must be prepared. The texts of the Mass and Divine Office ought to be carefully read over ahead of time. If need be a commentary, such as found in a good daily Missal or Dom Guéranger’s *The Liturgical Year* or Pius Parsch’s *The Church’s Year of Grace*, can be of great help. The reading of stories or texts from Sacred Scripture can also be very helpful. These can be from the Old Testament, when appropriate, in which case they need to be paraphrased or abbreviated and explained. Such is the case of the story of Creation and the Fall for the time of Septuagesima, or Isaiah’s prophesy of the Babylonian captivity and return there from in the time of Advent. Often the very texts of the Mass will suggest appropriate readings, such as the Psalms or the story of Job or the prophet Daniel and the three young men in the furnace, symbol of the Resurrection. Frequently, they will be from the New Testament, as is the case of the Nativity, or any of the mysteries in the lives of Our Lord, the Blessed Mother or the apostles that are directly told in Sacred Scripture.

Mary Reed Newland has this to say concerning such reading: “Reading from the Old Testament to children teaches them many things. It probes far back to the roots of our own liturgy. It follows the course of events from the Fall to the coming of Christ at Bethlehem and prophesies His glorious resurrection on Easter. It draws the whole plan of the redemption for them and begins to illuminate the prayers of the Mass. And together with the lives of the martyrs and saints of the New Testament, it gives them the best answer of all to the widespread proposition that men and women who love God in the heroic manner are sissies and cannot compete with cowboys and space cadets today.” (In *Raising your Children*, Integrity Vol. 2, p. 166 & 167).