

So I invite you: Study this Catechism! That is my heartfelt desire. This Catechism was not written to please you. It will not make life easy for you, because it demands of you a new life. It places before you the Gospel message as the “pearl of great value” (Mt. 13:46) for which you must give everything. So I beg you: Study this Catechism with passion and perseverance. Make a sacrifice of your time for it! Study it in the quiet of your room; read it with a friend; form study groups and networks; share with each other on the Internet. By all means continue to talk with each other about your faith.

You need to know what you believe. You need to know your faith with that same precision with which an IT specialist knows the inner workings of a computer. You need to understand it like a good musician knows the piece he is playing. Yes, you need to be more deeply rooted in the faith than the generation of your parents so that you can engage the challenges and temptations of this time with strength and determination. You need God’s help if your faith is not going to dry up like a dewdrop in the sun, if you want to resist the blandishments of consumerism, if your love is not to drown in pornography, if you are not going to betray the weak and leave the vulnerable helpless. [Pope Benedict XVI, “Foreword” to the *YOUCAT*: *Yout h Catechism of the Catholic Church*
(San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), 9.]

Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect (Romans 12: 2).

For a purpose that seemed clear in my own mind, I arrived at Saint Anne and Saint Patrick Parish in Fiskdale, MA, in October of 2007. Within a year, this purpose was no longer the one for which I remained. I had begun to organize groups in which we read and studied Pope Benedict XVI’s first two encyclicals. We first read *Spe Salvi* (*Saved In Hope*) and then moved on to his very first encyclical,

Deus Caritas Est
(
God Is Love
). In 2008, I was approached by the Director of Religious Education to help her with one of two things: launching a study of St. Paul's writings (the Year of Saint Paul began in 2008) or a study of the
United States Catholic Catechism for Adults
(USCCA). As attractive as St. Paul is to me, I did not hesitate to agree to work on the USCCA program.

In prior years, an initiation of both college and adult programs of catechesis was a dire need admitted to by myself and others with whom I worked or discussed such matters, but we never seemed to find a way to implement such programs. I suspect this impotence was due to our feeling inadequate to the task, and perhaps we suffered also from an "allergy" to catechesis. Perhaps the experience we had as children of being taught catechism is responsible for this allergy. Perhaps the allergy is due to our thinking that faith is something subjective and not necessarily something for which the mind seeks to be informed by the body of Church doctrine. "Leave theology to the theologians" we say, as we sneeze, and, "These are mysteries beyond me and most people", as we rub our eyes. Saint Paul did not think this way and he did not want the people in his communities to think this way. Paul writes, "God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ. A plan to be carried out in Christ, in the fullness of time, to bring all things into one in him, in the heavens and on the earth" (Ephesians 1: 9-10). The purpose of the USCCA, with its pedagogy directed at the experience of the Faith and the Church in the context of American society and culture, as well as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) upon which it is based, is precisely this: to lay out for all to see the Church's apprehension down the ages of the mystery of God's plan in Christ. Pope Benedict, earlier in the *Foreword* quoted from above, refers to the CCC as a "book." We should really see it as such, as a real
book
, a coherent, cogent, and provocative work – our "biography." It is a deeply
spiritual
book that can guide, inform, and help transform our broken lives. As He walked among us, Jesus healed people's bodies, but also He healed their minds through the teaching he imparted to them, and always, in both cases, for the sake of bringing faith in Him to life. If we entrust to the guidance of the Holy Spirit the application of our minds to the study of Jesus' teaching, the
content
of the Faith as it has been handed on to us from the Apostles through the Church, we will receive the grace of a Catholic fullness. We will acquire a breadth and depth of understanding of things human and Divine, and advance towards the full stature of Christ. With God's help, some of us can begin to overcome the resistance, the affliction of laziness that prevents our working to understand the Faith and our living it more completely.

At Saint Anne and Saint Patrick Parish, we are still working on the USCCA in conjunction with the CCC. (On the whole, the CCC offers fuller treatments of various Church teachings.) This is a reading and discussion group, and we take our time with it, mulling over the beauty of the Faith and tending to our hunger and thirst for truth and communion with one another and God. After all, how often do people have an opportunity to do this? After a break for the summer, we will resume these sessions in mid-October, picking up where we left off in our study of the Ten Commandments. We have a group of 10-15 people involved in these weekly sessions. Within the last couple of years, I was also involved in teaching a course on the CCC at Saint Mary's Parish in Southbridge.

Here, at Saint Anne and Saint Patrick Parish, I have helped with other reading projects. For three years running, we have had a summer reading group in which we have read Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (*The Sacrament of Charity*), Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* (*On the Regulation of Births*), and *Fatherless* , a novel by Brian J. Gail about the crises facing priests and laity in the late 20th century American church. I teach also in our Religious Education program that provides instruction for parents of children who will be receiving the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. On the horizon, both here in the parish and at Assumption College, are programs designed to impart the teaching of the Church on human sexuality, utilizing Blessed John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* . Some members of our newly founded Liturgy Committee will be taking advantage of the implementation of the Revised Roman Missal by offering a course about the Mass. And another parishioner is launching a course for high school students on the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church. The vitally important work of catechesis is growing, thanks be to God.

Why one comes to a place might turn out to be less important than why one stays there. I am grateful for the opportunities and graces that have come my way to participate in advancing works that conform to an Assumptionist striving for the truth of the Kingdom of God, and that foster the experience of the love of God, in us and around us.

Bro. Paul Henry, A.A.