



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
ON THE PRESENTATION OF
THE LATIN EDITION OF
THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Monday, 8 September 1997

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

1. With today's solemn ceremony I would like officially to present to the Church and to the world the Latin typical edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which on 15 August last, the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Assumption into Heaven, I approved and promulgated with the Apostolic Letter *Laetamur magnopere*.

I first express a deep sense of gratitude to almighty God, who, with the enlightening and strengthening assistance of his Spirit, has guided and supported the process of preparing the Catechism, which began over 10 years ago and now has finally been completed.

I warmly thank the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops who are members of the various Commissions that worked on this project and today are reaping with me the fruits of this intense and productive labour. My especially heartfelt thanks go to dear Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who has just expressed the sentiments of all present and, during these years, has presided over the work, guiding and co-ordinating it with commendable wisdom right to its successful conclusion.

I now entrust this definitive and normative text to the whole Church, particularly to the Pastors of the various Dioceses throughout the world: they in fact are the ones for whom this Catechism is primarily intended. In a certain sense Paul's expression could be rightly applied to this occasion: "I

received from the Lord what I also delivered to you" (1 Cor 11:23). Today's ceremony in fact is a point of arrival, but at the same time it marks a new "point of departure", since the Catechism, now completed, must be better and more widely known, received, disseminated and, above all, become a valuable, daily tool in pastoral work and evangelization.

2. The use to which this text can and should be put is varied and complementary, so that it will become more and more a "reference point" for all the Church's prophetic activity, especially at this time when we note a strong and urgent need for a new missionary effort and a relaunching of catechesis.

The Catechism in fact helps "deepen understanding of faith ... [and] is oriented towards the maturing of that faith, its putting down roots in personal life and its shining forth in personal conduct" (*CCC*, n. 23) for all the Church's members. It represents a sound, reliable tool for priests in their continuing formation and preaching; for catechists in their remote and proximate preparation for the service of the Word; for families in their growth towards the full realization of the potential inherent in the sacrament of marriage.

Theologians will be able to find in the Catechism an authoritative doctrinal reference for their tireless research. They are called to provide a valuable service for the Catechism, by deepening the understanding of the content set forth there in an essential and concise way, by further explaining the reasons underlying the doctrinal assertions, and by pointing out the deep connections linking the various truths, so as to highlight more and more "the wonderful unity of the mystery of God, his saving will, as well as the central place of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, sent by the Father, made man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be our Saviour" (Apostolic Constitution *Fidei depositum*, n. 3).

The Catechism is also offered as a valuable aid for the systematic updating of those working in the varied fields of ecclesial activity. More generally, it will be very useful for the continuing formation of every Christian, who by consulting it frequently or occasionally will be able to rediscover the depth and beauty of the Christian faith and will be led to exclaim in the words of the baptismal liturgy: "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rite for the Celebration of Baptism*).

In addition, there are many who have already found in this Catechism a valuable tool for personal and community prayer, for promoting and identifying the various complementary journeys of spirituality and for giving new vigour to their faith life. Nor should we fail to mention the ecumenical value of the Catechism. As many positive testimonies from Churches and Ecclesial Communities already attest, it can "support ecumenical efforts that are motivated by the holy desire for the unity of all Christians, show carefully the content and wondrous harmony of the Catholic faith" (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Fidei depositum*, n. 4). But for those asking questions or experiencing difficulty with their faith, or for those who do not believe at all or who no longer believe, the

Catechism can offer effective help by explaining what the Catholic Church believes and seeks to live, and by providing an enlightening stimulus in their quest for the Truth.

3. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* must serve in particular as a sure and authoritative reference text for writing various local catechisms (cf. *ibid.*, n. 4). In this regard Bishops and entire Episcopal Conferences have made praiseworthy efforts in preparing local catechisms, using the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as a "reference point". Progress should be made in this direction with watchful attention and tireless perseverance.

As I have done on other occasions, here I again offer my fervent encouragement that the Episcopal Conferences will undertake, with prudent patience but also courageous resolution, this imposing task, which must be carried out in accord with the Apostolic See. It is a question of drafting catechisms that are faithful to the essential content of Revelation and up-to-date in their methodology, and can educate the Christian generations to come in a solid faith.

Even if, in particular cases, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can be used as a national and local catechetical text, it is still necessary, where this has not yet occurred, to start preparing new catechisms, which, while presenting faithfully and completely the doctrinal content of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, will favour educational programmes diversified and structured according to the expectations of the recipients. These catechisms, making use of the valuable directions furnished by the new *General Directory for Catechesis*, soon to be published, are called to provide that "adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods required by the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity, and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom [catechesis] is addressed" (*CCC*, n. 24). In a way, then, the marvellous experience of the apostolic era will be repeated, when every believer heard the mighty works of God being told in his own tongue (cf. Acts 2:11) and, at the same time, the catholicity of the Church will be made even more tangible by the proclamation of the Word in the various languages of the world, forming "a melodious chorus sustained by the voices of unnumbered multitudes, rising in countless modulations, tones and harmonies for the praise of God from every part of the globe, at every moment of history" (Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, n. 17). Therefore, far from discouraging or even replacing local catechisms, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls for, encourages and guides their preparation.

4. I invite the clergy and faithful to make frequent and assiduous use of this Catechism, which I entrust in a special way to Mary most holy, the feast of whose Birth we celebrate today. And I pray that as the Blessed Virgin's birth was, at the beginning of the new era, a fundamental moment in the plan foreordained by God for the Incarnation of his Son, so may this Catechism, prepared on the threshold of the third millennium, become a useful tool for leading the Church and every member of the faithful to an ever deeper contemplation of the mystery of God made Man.

With these sentiments, as I thank those who had a share in editing and translating the *Catechism*

of the Catholic Church, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to each of you and to all those for whom this text is intended.

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