

In his own experience of growing up in the Catholic faith and in his pastoral care of the faithful since his ordination to the priesthood on May 24, 2003, Father Joseph Classen has witnessed a great hunger for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the saving truths which Christ communicates to us in the Church. Father Classen has seen directly how an insubstantial, even if well intentioned, presentation of the Catholic faith leaves the faithful dangerously adrift in a world sorely beset with the evils of materialism, secularism and relativism.

Without a firm grounding in the faith and its practice, today's Catholic is easily led to compromise his or her relationship with Christ and His Church for the sake of practicing a false tolerance and a "political correctness" which promises to make Catholicism acceptable to everyone. The danger of compromising the Catholic faith in our culture is not just theoretical. It has been sadly realized in the widespread phenomenon of "cafeteria Catholicism."

At the same time, the failure to give a direct and sound account of the faith leaves those who are not Catholic in confusion with regard to what Catholics believe and practice. This danger is also not merely theoretical. Not infrequently, middle-aged and young adult Catholics comment to me that they are not able or are not confident to hand on the faith to others, including their children, because the catechesis which they received was inadequate and even false. The new evangelization of our world depends upon the solid and strong witness of all Catholics in all of the arenas of human activity and endeavor, in which they find themselves. Without such witness, Catholics not only do not provide for others the light for which they are seeking, but they themselves end up lost in the darkness of our totally secularized society.

What should Catholics and others interested in the Catholic faith do in the face of the pervasive confusion and error regarding the Catholic faith, also among Catholics? It is certainly not helpful to become mired in discouragement over the situation of a certain Catholic illiteracy or in the assignment of blame to those who, over the past several decades, have failed to provide a more adequate catechesis. There is really only one correct response, the response which the Servant of God Pope John Paul II and Pope Paul VI before him constantly urged. It is the new evangelization, that is, the teaching, the celebrating and the living of our Catholic faith with the enthusiasm and energy of the first disciples of our Lord and of the missionaries who brought the Catholic faith to our

land. It is embracing our Catholic faith, in all of its richness, as if for the first time.

In his Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, “On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World,” the Servant of God Pope John Paul II described the challenge of the faithful today which is “a result of a constant spreading of an indifference to religion, of secularism and atheism” and which “inspires and sustains a life lived ‘as if God did not exist’.” He declared: “This indifference to religion and the practice of religion devoid of true meaning in the face of life’s very serious problems, are not less worrying and upsetting when compared with declared atheism” (No. 34).

What response does Pope John Paul II urge? He reminds us of Christ’s own mandate to all in the Church, in every state of life:

Certainly the command of Jesus: “Go and preach the Gospel” always maintains its vital value and its ever-pressing obligation. Nevertheless, the *present situation*, not only of the world but also of many parts of the Church, *absolutely demands that the word of Christ receive a more ready and generous obedience*. Every disciple is personally called by name; no disciple can withhold making a response: “Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel” (*1 Cor 9:16*) (No. 33).

Before the present and urgent call to give a solid and strong witness of obedience to the faith, it is the task of all in the Church to know the faith, to celebrate the faith and to practice the faith in everyday life. All in the Church are called to be about the work of preaching the Gospel. It is imperative, therefore, to deepen our knowledge of the Catholic faith, especially in the context of the questioning and confusion about the fundamental truths of the faith, both within the Church and in society, in general.

Knowing his own experience of confusion about the faith and its practice, and seeing how those whom he serves as a priest suffer from a widespread confusion and error regarding the Catholic faith, Father Classen has prepared the first volume of his *Meat and Potatoes Catholicism*, a response of pastoral charity in the face of the hunger for the truth and love of Christ, on the part of many. The

response is a plain-spoken and substantial presentation of the teaching of the Church. *Meat and Potatoes Catholicism* provides a practical and reliable guide to those who want to deepen their knowledge of the faith for the sake of living more fully in Christ and of drawing others to life in Christ. It is a most worthy tool of the new evangelization which is so very much needed in our time.

Meat and Potatoes Catholicism provides the substance of the Church's teaching. At the same time, Father Classen gives timely indications of the sources by which the reader can further deepen his knowledge of the truths of the faith. The primary source is, of course, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which not only enunciates the content of our faith and its practice but also leads us to the Holy Scriptures and Sacred Tradition, to the *Code of Canon Law*, and to the secure teachers of the faith down the Christian centuries. In his customary direct manner, Father Classen also indicates that he frequently relies upon the writings of the Servant of God Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen in his presentation of the faith.

Most fittingly, in the first volume of *Meat and Potatoes Catholicism*, Father Classen draws upon his personal and pastoral experience to present the Church's teaching on the Sacraments. The Sacraments, above all, the Holy Eucharist, are the source of our life in Christ in the Church and, at the same time, the highest expression of Christ's life within us. Regarding the Holy Eucharist, Pope Benedict XVI succinctly observed:

In this sacrament, the Lord truly becomes food for us, to satisfy our hunger for truth and freedom. Since only the truth can make us free (cf. *Jn* 8:32), Christ becomes for us the food of truth (Pope Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, "On the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission, 22 February 2007, n. 2).

The most fitting and effective way to help Catholics to deepen their understanding of the faith and to attract others to the Catholic Church is the presentation of the Church's teaching on the Sacraments. Father Classen presents each of the Sacraments with care, placing his presentation within the context of today's frequently-asked questions and common areas of confusion about the Sacraments.

May this first volume of *Meat and Potatoes Catholicism* provide for you the solid nourishment of the presentation of the Catholic faith in its integrity. May it be a source of inspiration and strength for you in taking up the work of the new evangelization.

I conclude by expressing the hope that Father Joseph Classen will be able to continue his work of pastoral charity, begun with this volume, by writing additional volumes of *Meat and Potatoes Catholicism*.

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