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Priest's book explains the Catholic faith

by Joseph Kenny, Review Staff Writer

An avid fisherman, Father Joseph Classen continues to reel people into the Catholic faith.

Father Classen has written his second book, published by Our Sunday Visitor, "Meat & Potatoes Catholicism." The St. Charles native, who is associate pastor of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish in Oakville, seeks to re-educate and re-evangelize Catholics with an understandable approach to the basic fundamental teachings of the Church.

"Basically, as the title says, I wanted to deliver the meat and potatoes of the faith in a very down-to-earth, upfront fashion in a way the average person will want to read," Father Classen said.

The theology in the book "is straight from the catechism," he noted, filled in with stories he tells to set the stage and allow readers to "dive right into it."

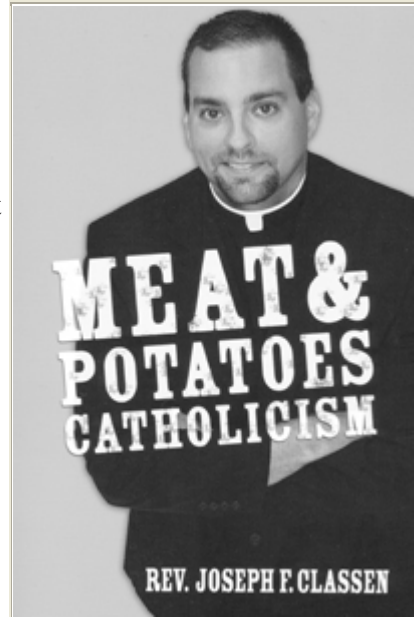
Ordained in 2003, Father Classen has talked about how, as do many other adolescents, he went through a period of questioning his faith. He returned to the Church in college. "Growing up I realized I just didn't know the meat and potatoes of my faith. As a priest, and as any priest will tell you, we run into so many Catholics who just don't know the basics of their faith," he said.

Catholics also find that Christians of other denominations "really know their stuff" while Catholics can't defend their faith because they don't know its basic principles, he said.

"There's so much great catechetical information out there, but a lot of it is so far over people's heads that you almost have to have a doctorate in theology to understand some of the lingo."

His book is one attempt to provide an easier approach, but he noted there are other ways people can get the information they need.

He laughed as he said that "people start looking at their watch" when a homily goes over 10 minutes. "There's a responsibility on all of us, priests included, to stay up on this and educate ourselves. And there are many great resources today," he said, citing Catholic websites, radio stations and more that present the Church's teachings in an easy-to-



understand manner.

He advises people to get information on the Church from Church sources. Other organizations or publications often have a biased approach, he noted.

People should ask their parish priest for a few resources, he said.

Parishes are more active in bringing in guest speakers, evenings of reflections or workshops, Father Classen said. Archdiocesan agencies also give presentations.

In "Meat and Potatoes," Father Classen wrote that he was forced to learn in the seminary by translating the material into layman's terms. He came to realize that most Catholics' education on the faith was at about a fifth-grade level.

He addresses issues such as the priests' sex abuse scandal, same-sex "marriage," abortion, contraception and stem-cell research.

He also discusses the reasons why people quit the Church and how they should see the Church as their home.

"We hear so many reasons for people leaving the faith. 'I quit going to church because the priest yelled at me because my baby was crying.' These are the type of things that hurt feelings, but it's no reason to throw out your faith in Jesus Christ and abandon His Church."

Also the author of "Hunting for God, Fishing for the Lord," which looks at spirituality and the outdoors, Father Classen seeks to help Catholics take ownership of their faith and provide a source of information for all those inquiring about the faith.

He has a third book, a follow-up to "Hunting for God," coming out next spring and another book in the planning stages.

The books "write themselves," he said, explaining that at times he captures his thoughts on napkins, receipts or whatever else he can find.

"I get ideas at the strangest times and put them in a folder. They evolve into an outline and then I write it." Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, in a foreword to "Meat and Potatoes," wrote that 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 the Church.

Father Classen, he wrote, 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."

After all, several other followers of Christ, the Apostles, also were fishermen.

To purchase copies of the book visit area Catholic bookstores or see the website www.huntingforgod.com.