

Catechism on Prayer

Taken from **A Surge in Prayer**
A Six Part Course on Prayer
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Part 1 Introduction

To really understand the Catholic faith, we need to go to the Catechism for **guidance, teaching** and **exhortation** (strong urging to do something).

The Catechism has **four interdependent parts** :

a-What we Believe,

b- How we Worship,

c- How we live out our Faith,

d- How we Pray.

1a- What is the Catechism?

It is book that contains the **fundamentals of Christian Truths** formulated in a way that makes them understandable.

This current version of the catechism ----and don't call it the new Catechism because that is not what it is --- is called the **Catechism of the Catholic Church**. It is a **re-statement**, it is not new.

It has its origins back to 1985. It was at this time that John Paul II appointed a commission of Cardinals and Bishops to represent the truths of the faith.

In 1989, this commission sent a proposed text to every bishop in the world and got back 24, 000 suggestions.

After weeding through all of those suggestions, they, in 1991, gave it to the Pope John Paul II and he approved it.

In 1992, the **official version** was promoted. It arrived in the US in 1994 and it became a sensation ! a bestseller! It was very hard to get. If you consider the rate at which the Church moves, ten years, 1985-1994, was a very short time. It was done very quickly.

2a- What is the Catechism for?

Well, it conveys the **basic truths**; it is a positive **explanation of doctrine**; it assists those involved in teaching the faith. But it is for more than that.

It is for teachers of the faith such as priests and catechists but it is also for us, the faithful in the pews. It has been given to us in a spirit of communion, made available to us for use in our **mission of evangelization**.

In short, the Catechism is a resource for all Christians, those of other faiths, and for agnostics and atheists too.

Part 2 What are the Fundamentals of the Faith?

Once again, the Catechism is a book containing the **fundamentals of the Catholic tradition**. What exactly are the fundamentals of our faith?

While you are thinking about that; if you asked a Muslim the same question, they would answer right away with the 5 pillars of their faith: no God but Allah; trip to mecca in a lifetime; prayer 5 x day; 2.5% income to poor/need; fasting during Ramadan.

Now ask a Christian the same question; who knows what you might get as an answer.

Well, there are **four books in the Catechism**: Creed, Sacraments, Commandments, Our Father.

The **four pillars of the Christian faith are reflected in the Catechism**:

Book 1 Profession of faith;

Book 2 Celebration of the Mysteries via the Mass and the Sacraments;

Book 3 Life in Christ or morality via the Commandments and the Beatitudes;

Book 4 Prayer. There are two fundamental sections on prayer: exposition on prayer; explanation of the our Father prayer.

Please see that there is a **sequence** here. Follow the sequence.

1 First of all, we ask who God is. The Creed answers that question for us. Our unique Christian answer to that question is that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Once it has been understood that God is our Creator, Savior, Redeemer and Sanctifier, the correct response then is to worship Him in thanksgiving.

2 Secondly, we worship God via the Sacraments and the Mass. Followed by

3 Thirdly, living a life in accordance with these truths. I am a child of God. I need to behave like one by living a moral life via the Commandments and the Beatitudes.

So then, knowing who God is and how to worship Him properly by living in Christ leads a soul to want to talk to Him, to pray.

4 Fourthly, what is interesting is that you can start anywhere in the chain. If you start with prayer, prayer lead to who is God, then to worship Him, and then to living a life according to His law.

These **four pillars, this sequence, is built into the Catechism and into the Catechism of Trent and into any authentic method of formation.**

So we go to the Catechism for teaching and guidance and exhortation because we can be sure of its teachings.

Part 3

What's in the Catechism?

The Catechism is not loaded with theological propositions. It is fundamentally composed of two sources: **Scriptures, Sayings of the Saints.** No theology in here. Belief trumps theology every time. Belief comes first and the explanation follows later. We can be sure of its teachings and then of its teachings on prayer.

So what then does the Catechism tell us about prayer? But first let's consider another aspect.

Who wrote this section on prayer?

Something is very clear. When you go through the Catechism and you get in to the first three sections you notice a style. Maybe you'd say a method.

But when you enter the part of the Catechism on prayer you can note that it is totally different from the other three parts. The writing and expressions are different. The feel is different. It is not the topic at all, it is the way it was written, the way the topics were addressed. Cardinal Ratzinger (Pope Benedict) who was the leader in the Catechism project, said that initially, there was just going to be three pillars. There wasn't going to be a book on prayer. But, when they realized the need, they didn't know where to go to get it written.

They ended up going to Lebanon, to a Maronite priest, a Catholic priest in Lebanon. His name was **Jean Corbon**, a Frenchman.

This is how Cardinal Ratzinger described the situation: **"Having resolved to add a distinct fourth part on prayer to the Catechism, we looked for a representative from the east, since it was not possible to secure a bishop as author. We settled upon Jean Corbon. He wrote the beautiful concluding text on prayer in beleaguered Beirut. He was frequently in the middle of dramatic situations. He often had to take shelter in his basement to continue working during the bombardments."**

That is an incredible image. Here is a holy, devoted priest in Beirut with bombs falling around him and him in his basement composing this 4th part of the catechism!

So, what exactly does the Catechism tell us about prayer? Let's find out.

