**Can the Catechism Draw Us Into Prayer?**

**A Practice in Doctrinal Lectio Divina**

When you ask someone how they would describe prayer or their personal prayer life, expect multiple answers. Depending who you ask, this is either an easy or difficult question to answer. Nevertheless it’s a fair question to ask when engaging someone in the faith.

The mere thought of praying may lead some to dread it means they will have to give up something important in order to pray. Imagine if Mass would go past an hour and the congregation would be asked to meditate a bit more intensely after reception of Holy Communion. Lord forbid if this was to happen. In this current day and age, we are wired for expediency instead of patience. We are reactionary instead of prudent. Negatively speaking, prayer is seen as nuisance in many circles unless you are desperate for God to answer a certain prayer without really praying to Him.

St. John Damascene once commented that “prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God . . .” The interesting thing about this quote is that the first premise is to raise our minds and hearts to God. But what if we can’t do what St. John Damascene says? What if our attempt to pray is really dry and empty? All of us at some time or another have experienced these degrees of emptiness and dryness in prayer. It’s an experience where we are called to not dwell on ourselves but instead direct all of our faculties to Christ. St. Augustine would say that “we are called to be beggars before God.”

Of the various tools available to help us pray there is one that many may not consider useful or associate with developing a prayer life. This specific tool is the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Often times the Catechism is misunderstood as a mere resource book for the academically elite. This unfortunate mindset proposed liberally when the Catechism first came out over twenty years ago does a great disservice to the gift the Catechism has actually been to the Church. If one were to carefully read St. John Paul II’s Apostolic Constitution [Fidei Depositum](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/aposcons.htm) which serves as the introduction to the Catechism, he clearly stated that the Catechism of the Catholic Church . . . is offered to every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (3). With that said the Catechism’s aim is to bring the light of joy and hope to the faithful in learning more about their Catholic faith.

The Catechism serves as a symphony of faith where an individual can carefully immerse himself in the teachings of the Church. From the basic formulation of the four pillars **(Profession of Faith, Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Life In Christ, and Prayer)**, the Catechism prayerfully invites the person to walk with Christ in order to know Him more intimately. This is why the Apostles Creed serves as the structure of the first pillar. Even more, the Catechism is an invitation to become better acquainted with God’s family which we are members by virtue of our Baptism.

When you take the time to see the beautiful structure of the Catechism, you immediately come across a systematic method aimed to draw us deeper into the mysteries of Christ and His Church. A good way to extract the beauty of the Catechism is creating a Lectio Divina outline on the Catechism. I used this method and developed a manual to train catechists in how to immerse themselves in prayer via the Catechism and learn to meditate more about their faith. What this format does is allow the person to essentially pray with the Catechism. Utilizing the basic Lectio Divina format I carefully selected certain doctrines that cover a general area of the Catechism allowing the individual to pray and meditate on them at his leisure.

The basic structure would consist of a key doctrine of the faith e.g. “The Desire for God” found in section One of the Catechism and then carefully use the Lectio Divina format to pick out certain scripture and catechism references in conjunction with the doctrine. This first step would comprise the **Lectio** and **Meditatio** segments of the Lectio Divina. I would then select more key articles from the Catechism for the **Oratio** to strengthen the individuals understanding of the faith which would then lead to the **Contemplatio** where a series of reflection questions would be tied the doctrine. Here’s a sample:

***The Desire for God***

**Lectio**

Reflect and meditate on the following scripture passages to help you foster a deeper desire for God.

**Gen 1:27; Acts 17:26-28**

His Divine power has granted us all things . . . **2 Pt 1:3-4**

**Meditatio:**

*In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through who he created the world.* **Heb 1:1-2**

*The* ***Desire for God*** *is written in the Human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself.*

**CCC 27**

**Oratio:**

The ***Search for God*** requires the effort of the human intellect, a correct will, an upright heart, and the witness to others who teach us to seek God. CCC 30

Stages of ***Divine Revelation***; the covenants culminate in Jesus Christ. CCC 51-67

***Attributes of God***: almighty yet merciful. CCC 268-276

**Contemplatio:**

Do we desire a relationship with God in our hearts?

Is God established as the central focal point in everything we do?

Through free will, how do we develop or ignore our relationship with God?

As you can see there is a unique and distinct relationship between the Catechism and Lectio Divina which should not be overlooked. Both pillars serve as part of the symphony of grace I mentioned earlier. When you apply the spiritual discipline of Lectio Divina upon the Catechism, the symphony of grace begins to take hold where the person begins to immerse himself into these guideposts of faith.

This method worked very well when training catechists as part of their evangelization and catechetical formation. Everyone involved immediately began to recognize the beauty and value of the Catechism which in turn allowed them to dive deeper into the doctrine of the faith. The “Desire for God” took on a different meaning for them and the results were truly remarkable. Since the desire for God is written in our human hearts, our openness to prayer serves as the vehicle to strengthen this desire. Prayer and the Catechism is an inseparable union in that it constitutes our way of life in Christ. Both concern the Christian life, the same love and the same renunciation, proceeding from love; the same filial and loving conformity with the Father’s plan of love; the same transforming union in the Holy Spirit who conforms us more and more to Christ Jesus; the same love for all men, the love with which Jesus has loved us (CCC 2745).