

Catholic Basics Questions (and Answers)

from "What's in the Catechism of the Catholic Church?" January 26, 2023

The Baltimore Catechism is a lot smaller (than the one we used in our session).

It sure is. The Baltimore Catechism was primarily aimed at children and sought to have them learn by rote memorization the important parts of our Faith. There's nothing wrong with memorization, but most adults wish to go beyond that and understand why we have certain beliefs, traditions, practices, or Sacraments. As St. Paul told the Corinthians "When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things." (1 Cor 13:11) So too with the Church - we have resources for simple memorization, and for a summary of the Faith (the Catechism we studied). Yet anyone can go deeper still - back to the source documents cited in the Catechism if they're so inclined. Having this variety of resources allows the Church to meet people where they are, but also to provide more concrete teaching to allow one to know the Faith and so be better able to respond to others (as expressed in the answer to question 5.)

How do you respond to people who challenge ways of Catholics and their beliefs?

Sometimes, you don't. One should always look to have prudential judgment as to when and how to engage those who challenge or criticize the Faith. Especially when engaging a stranger over social media, the likelihood of a fruitful, loving dialogue is often very unlikely. It's a completely different matter if people are truly seeking to understand, even if posed in a challenging way.

That said, as Peter told us "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence..." (1 Peter 3:15-16)

And so - be ready indeed. Pray. Read the Catechism and the Bible. You will never be prepared to answer every detail of Church teaching (which is why we have 2,000 years of theology, Canon Law, and Councils, where the finest points have been debated...) But at minimum, be ready to explain why you love Christ and why you believe He founded one Church. You can always go well beyond that by reading books on defending the faith - called "apologetics," although these too will vary widely based on who's doing the challenging. Mainstream Lutheran challenges will be markedly different from Non-Denominational Baptists, and different still from an atheist or a Jehovah's Witness.

How do I ask God to help me control my emotions to stop me from doing something stupid out of passion?

- Have a laser focus on wanting to stop this habit, or ease this passion. Knowing it, naming it, and owning it is an important first step.
- What are the occasions that lead me to sin? Adopt a mode of life that's suited to avoid those things that lead me to sin. If you are always gluttonous when watching football at a particular bar, maybe that's no longer where you go to watch football. It's one of the reasons that we promise to "avoid what leads us to sin" when we make an Act of Contrition.
- Have accountability in your life. If Catholic, that may be a Confessor or Spiritual Director and, along with the grace of the Sacrament of Confession, will help you make progress toward easing simply acting on your passions. Take full advantage of the Sacraments - the Eucharist and Reconciliation are two powerful weapons in producing discipline. But they're not magic - they give you grace to aid you in your fight, and Reconciliation wipes the slate clean. Additionally (including those not yet Catholic), a spouse, a friend, a therapist, or a support group are all appropriate ways to seek accountability.
- Be kind to yourself. This is something everyone struggles with - and each vice is different. We are a passionate people, and it is only through continued discipline, prayer (and fasting!) that we begin to conform our will more closely to the will of God. Yet you will still stumble, so ask God's forgiveness, pick yourself up and try again. Notice and celebrate the little improvements, and don't hold onto things in your past, especially those for which you've already received God's mercy through Baptism or Reconciliation.
- Look to the Saints. One beauty of our connection to the Saints is the example that we can follow. Whether that be praying with Teresa of Avila's "The Interior Castle," or praying for the intercession of St. Augustine or St. Mary of Egypt, who both overcame notable passions, we can realize that Sainthood lies before us, not behind us.

