

Keeping the Mass, III

sermons and inserts for this series starting with about knowing the forms or the basics of prayer, fleeing lukewarmness, knowing the Mass, fighting temptations, and knowing the catechism.

Next, let the construction of our sanctuary be considered as part of this formation. At first, what a church looks like makes very little difference to the beginner in the interior life. He is unaware of the history, and the theology of the shape of his parish church, and if he thinks about it at all, he is concerned only with whether he can hear the sermon, or whether the seats are comfortable, or when the Mass will be over so that he can hurry away. But our ancestors were not this way at all. They transformed pagan temples, not just to suit a different sort of ritual. The transformation was meant to express an entirely different view of the world.

In a pagan temple, you entered through a very wide entrance, perhaps not through a door at all. Your eyes went flat, your gaze was directed widely and horizontally. There was one big room, with an altar often in the center. Pagan religion was religion to be sure, since to have a religion, something must be sacrificed, something has to die. If there is no sacrifice, then you have a philosophy. But the Christians put a door not on the broad side of the North, but on the narrow side of the west, so that when you entered, you were drawn to look the altar, which was placed at the east. They divided the temple into three parts, with each one higher than the next, so that the gaze of the Christian would go up. The altar was shrouded in a canopy and curtains – the antitype of the Holy of Holies – which held the Ark of the Covenant.

These changes expressed a bridal expectancy and linear time. The pagan view was one of repeating and unending life-cycles in an eternal material universe. In pagan architec-

ture there was no upward movement, and no shrouded mystery at the conclusion of the movement. In their world view there was no expectation that human life is headed toward anything very much different from what already exists. But in our worldview a climax is expected, when time itself will end and God will consummate His marriage with His chosen bride, His people. But for now, the bride and God the bridegroom are set apart. So there is a separation of the sanctuary, a lifting up of the eyes, and the whole place decorated in mystery.

With churches built by the thousands after the promulgation of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, and these constructions being just as ugly as sin (worse than the pagan temples sometimes), Catholics just rolled over and took the affront and paid for these things. And these new churches were not cheap. This is because amongst other things, they did not know anything about church architecture and what is more did not care. May we learn from the experience! May we not repeat that tragedy, but be firm in insisting that our churches be truly beautiful, in harmony with tradition, and the Mass. Anything less and we deserve to lose our Mass.

Catholics who do not know their catechism are ripe for a falling away from the Faith. There is no excuse for not knowing the catechism. Besides adult education at the parish (which is in-depth catechism), and the recordings on the Baltimore Catechism on the parish website, there are many other avenues to pursue. But reading is indispensable. Reading is the workhorse of learning. Here is a list of catechism's which are rich in teaching and wisdom, and provide good ground for the life of prayer. As I was trying to get across in my last sermon, without good doctrine we will be incapable for the ascent of the mind and heart to God.

[The Roman Catechism \(Catechism of the Council of Trent\)](#), [The Small Catechism of St. Robert Bellarmine](#), [The Catechism of St. Pius X](#), [The Baltimore Catechism](#), [My Catholic Faith](#), [The Catholic Catechism](#) by Fr. John Hardon, and [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#). These have different approaches and emphases, but are all rock-solid.

With a good formation in catechism, we are in a good position to resist the errors of the historical-critical method, which has ruined the formation of so many priests and laity. The only way in fact to fully embrace that method, is to completely ignore the catechism.

This may sound very strange, but the father of Old Testament higher criticism, Hermann Gunkel, approached Scripture from the absolute separation of faith and reason that sprang from the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. This unreasonable separation of the objects of Christian faith from the objects of human reason tended to place the objects of faith in an "alternate world" from the world of reality that presents itself to sense perception and natural reason. On the basis of this false principle of separation, liberal Protestant thinkers felt

invited to reduce the world of Sacred Scripture with all of its details to a fictitious world whose historicity was just waiting to be "debunked."

By the way, this general attack, on an even more thoroughgoing level, had already been made more than a century earlier by the Englishman Thomas Hobbes in his notorious work *Leviathan* (1651). Hobbes was a complete materialist who denied the possibility of anything supernatural and even the existence of the human soul. It was his teaching that miracles do not take place, and so he reduced the reports of miracles recounted in Sacred Scripture to mere misinterpretations of natural events traceable to the gullibility of the onlookers. In fine, Hobbes characterized the New Testament teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of Heaven to be simply a misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God on earth portrayed in the Old Testament. But Hobbes did not have any sound historical evidence for his theory.

And the father of New Testament higher criticism, Rudolf Bultmann, took the same approach but only more radically. A Lutheran minister, he served with distinction in the German Army in WWI. But this method of criticism got a hold of him, and naturally I suppose, he began to disbelieve in the truth of Scripture. At the end of his life he was playing with Tarot cards, searching for truth in the occult.

With a good basis in catechism, we are prepared to face the numerous attacks against the traditional Mass in a far deeper way. This does not mean that because one knows their catechism they are ready to debate about the Mass. That's another thing entirely, since very few people know how to debate. They just know how to quarrel.

So I've tried to cover some basics in the