

Catechism of the Catholic Church-Pillars of Faith Series

“CREED-WHAT WE BELIEVE”

*Bishop Donald Hying addressed about 450 people at Saint Dennis Church on Tuesday, September 24, 2019. This is the first of three talks given by Bishop Hying; it focuses on the first pillar of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.*

**Introductory Remarks by Bishop Donald Hying**

Thank you so much for coming tonight.

When I was first ordained, in all my zeal, if I did something like this and we had less than 500 people, I'd be devastated and thought it was a failure. After about ten years of priesthood, if five people showed up I was grateful, right? (laughter) So I came to the point of realizing that God sends in the door whoever is supposed to be here. So, thank you for allowing the Lord to blow you in the door tonight. And, we just trust God's Holy Spirit that He will speak to us, the mystery of our faith, the beauty of our faith, Christ's revelation to us -- who we are in God and who God is, and that divine relationship that is the very essence of our life.

So tomorrow it will be three months since I was installed as your bishop, and it's just been a magic, wonderful time. I have no doubt that that will simply continue to be. I'm very grateful for that.

I went to my first Badgers' game on Saturday. What a way to start, right?! (laughter, applause) I'd never been; I'd watched Badgers' football on television and never actually been in Camp Randall Stadium. So, everybody said, “You have to come back every week (laughter) after this past Saturday.” But, I was looking at 90,000 people absolutely going nuts over football and thinking, “This is great, but what if you had 90,000 people in Camp Randall going nuts over Jesus? Wouldn't that be something, right?” (applause) Maybe we'll get there. I met the chancellor of the university, so I'm going to ask her if we can borrow the stadium for Mass (laughter) sometime. Who knows?

I love to teach, and I'm grateful for the gracious opportunity to be here. So, I just thank our priests, our deacons, our religious, and all of you for coming tonight. But, also for what you do to live out the faith, to be a witness to the resurrection of Christ. Because, each one of you rubs shoulders with all sorts of people that will never come and talk to us. You may be the only Christ that someone in this world encounters. You may be the

only Bible that they read. Your acts of mercy may be the only love that they experience. So when we think of our lives in that vast panorama of salvation, we realize that God has strategically placed us exactly where we're supposed to be: to give witness to the power, to the salvation and to the mercy of Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, which is relationship with God.

And so, everywhere today, Catholics are talking about the same questions, I think. You know: How can I have a deeper relationship with God? How do I talk about my faith to people in my family or friends who no longer practice? How can I have a satisfying and fruitful prayer life? How can I understand my faith so well that when somebody at work asks me a question, I can actually give them an answer?

### **Overview of the Catechism of the Catholic Church**

So, the beauty of having this Catechism is that here is, for the first time since the Council of Trent, the composite of everything that the Catholic Church believes and teaches. Saint John Paul II left us many great gifts. One of his greatest gifts, I'm convinced, is this Catechism. He brought together a group, starting in 1985, to start formulating and writing this document that came out in English in 1994. And ever since then whenever I would start in a new parish as a priest, the first thing I would do is order a thousand copies of this -- which was a bold act of faith (laughter). But if I ordered 1,000, they were \$5 apiece. So, I'd spend \$5,000 of my own money in order to buy a thousand Catechisms, and I'd sell them after Mass. And, I'd always sell out. And then, once they'd spent their five bucks, they wanted to know what to do with this thing, right? (laughter) So then I'd offer adult formation classes; you know, bring your Catechism, we're going to go through the highlights of this. So, that's the way you lure people in: you get them to buy something and then say, "I'm going to show you how to use this."

So, the power of this Catechism -- it's beautiful -- and it's true. When I think of Catholicism, I think of this 5,000-room palace. Think of the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna. It's got probably 3,000 rooms in it. Catholicism is this 5,000-room palace with all the treasures of God's heart: the fullness of his truth, the experience of the mystics, the lives of the saints, the Holy Scriptures, Beethoven's Mass in D-minor, Notre Dame Cathedral, and all the people that have lived this faith for 2,000 years -- the composite of our faith. And in my lifetime, I'm probably going to get into 33 of those rooms. So tonight, we're going to just kind of peek in the door and start looking at just the very basics of our faith.

The Catechism is divided into four parts. The first part looks at the Creed, and the Creed is all about what we believe. Every Sunday we stand up and we recite the Nicene Creed. Sometimes we might kind of do it by rote and kind of not really think of the words because we've done it so often. And no creed can capture the Mystery of God. No human words can fully permeate the mystery. But the words of the Creed reveal to us what God has said about Himself to us: who He is in his deepest nature, as Trinity, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Creed speaks to us of the centrality of Christ and His saving mission and His life, death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Church, the power of the Sacraments. So, when we recite the Creed, we are saying, "This is what we hold to be most fundamentally true." And it's this faith of ours that guides us toward the fullness of life. So, the first part is the Creed.

The second part reflects on the Sacraments. The Sacraments keep Jesus from being simply a pious memory of somebody that lived two thousand years ago. The Sacraments bring the fullness of Christ's life, presence, grace, mercy and salvation to us, right here, right now. So the beauty of having the reserved Blessed Sacrament in St. Dennis Church means that, sacramentally, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, sacramentally abides here in Madison, Wisconsin, two thousand years after Jesus in his bodily form left this earth.

When you think about it, the Son of God came to earth and fell so profoundly in love with us that He didn't want to leave. So, the Eucharist is this, this beautiful, imaginative way that Jesus remains with us. And all the Sacraments bring us into that relationship with the Lord.

The third part is on the Ten Commandments. Once we have this faith and once we've experienced God, how do we live that out in action? So, who we are and what we believe comes before what we do, but what we do is significant and essential, as well. How do we live out our faith?

And the fourth section is on Prayer. You know, how do we build a relationship with the Lord. So to think that in the brevity of tonight I'm going to get through an entire first section on the Creed is like saying "We're going to read Thomas Aquinas's 'Summa Theologica' in thirty minutes." I mean, it's not going to happen. So, we're just going to go through some basic things.

### **Coming to Know God**

I want to start with this Scripture passage, which is what the prologue of the Catechism starts with. And, it's from John's Gospel, Chapter 17, and it's Jesus speaking: "Father, this

is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

"God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth." That's Timothy. There's no other name under heaven given to us by which we must be saved than the name of Jesus.

In that first passage, Jesus says that God's greatest desire is that we come to know God. And the Greek word for knowledge is reflective of the Hebrew word for knowledge, and it reflects a marital imagery. It's the same way that a husband and wife know each other, in the depths of your being, in the sharing of your life, in this union of body, soul, mind and heart. God's greatest desire and the only reason that He created us was that we would enter into relationship with Him and that we would learn to do here on earth what we hope to do perfectly in heaven. That is, to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

When you think about it, if my only purpose in this life is to learn to love God as perfectly as I can so that I can do it perfectly in heaven, then everything else falls into that mission and that purpose -- or, it doesn't. So if we look at what's the ultimate goal? The ultimate goal is salvation. The ultimate goal is eternal life. Then, we work our way backward to say, "What do I do tomorrow morning when I get up?"

We have just a few short years of life on this earth to do what we hope to do perfectly, and that is to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind and to be in relationship with Him. God's greatest passion, God's greatest mission for us is to seek us out, to find us, and to invite us into relationship.

You can go into Barnes & Noble or you can go on-line to Amazon, and there's probably 5,000 spiritual titles of books that talk about humanity's search for God, or humanity's longing for transcendence, or looking for some sort of spiritual connection. But Christianity presents something to us even more astonishing than our desire for God, and it's this: that before we even can think about God or love God, He is already searching us out; He is already looking for us.

Two Sundays ago, we had three parables in the Gospel if the priest read the longer version of the Gospel. And the first is the parable of the good shepherd; second is the parable of the lost coin; and, the third is the parable of the prodigal son, right? And in the parable of the good shepherd the narrative says, "What shepherd would not leave 99 sheep in the wilderness and go in search of the lost one sheep?"

My human response to that question is, nobody would do that, right? The answer is none. I mean, from just a human, logical perspective, what shepherd would leave 99 to go in search of the one? Wouldn't you just write off the one and say, "That's just the cost of doing business. I'm staying with the 99." That's what makes sense.

But, we see in the impulse of the shepherd to go after the one lost stray, kind of the human illogic of God's love for us: that He is so passionately in love with you and me that He loves each of us as if we are the only one -- as if we're the one that is the specialty of His heart. And indeed, each one of us is. Thus, the good shepherd that searches us out, the woman that seeks out the lost coin. And in the parable of the prodigal son, I'm always struck lately by this passage -- it's after the prodigal son has come to his senses and decides he's going to come home and make his big apology and just settle for being a servant because he's messed it all up -- it says, while he was still far off, the father caught sight of him and was moved deeply with compassion and ran to him and embraced him and kissed him. What that says to me is that every morning the father must have climbed to the highest brow of the highest hill on his farm and scanned the horizon, hoping against hope, that maybe today is the day that his son would return home. That maybe today is the day when he would see this familiar figure on the horizon getting bigger as he neared his house. Then one day it happened. So, God is looking for us. And the whole Christian mystery then is God stepping toward us and inviting us into relationship with Him. So, we are made for God.

### **The Existence of God-Whether God Exists or Not**

The Catechism deals with the whole question of God's existence. And it really wasn't until the French Revolution that atheism came to be a system. There were obviously atheists before the French Revolution. There were rumors around Rome at the time of the famous painter, Raphael, that he was a closet atheist, but he painted the most beautiful religious pictures. I'm not sure how you could be an atheist and paint what he painted. But, atheism as a thought system did not gain any traction or credibility until the French Revolution.

But today we live in a world where many people would say, "God doesn't exist, or if He does it really has no relevance to my life." We can speak of atheism; we can speak of agnosticism. But, in many ways we live in a self-contained and a self-referential world today. And maybe part of our greatest difficulty is that we've attained such a great level of material success and self-sufficiency that it's tempting to think, "Well, what do I need God for? I have everything I could possibly need and want."

I was blessed to do four years of work in the Dominican Republic, working among people who were very materially poor. And, their joy and their faith was a remarkable gift to see. I thought, in some ways, they don't have all the distractions that we do. In some ways, the clarity of their faith was so beautiful and direct. In our culture today, we are so overstimulated, so frenetic, so much going on, so much distraction, that it's really hard to hear that gentle and urgent voice of God in our life.

But we are all here, because, one way or another, we have come to the absolute conviction that God exists. And if God exists, then that changes everything for us, doesn't it? If God exists, then I'm created by God. If God exists, then there's an eternal life. If God exists, then I have a mission and a purpose that transcends this material world. So, the fundamental question -- whether God is or not -- is a very profound one.

I'm sure you've had this experience where you meet somebody that just kind of seems to live on the superficial level of life, and you try to ask them probing questions, like: "What makes you tick? What's your meaning structure? Why do you get up in the morning?" Sometimes you just come to the realization they haven't really thought about any of those questions, right?

I think about those questions all the time, and it's hard to think of people that just kind of walk through life and don't ever really think about the big questions. But the ultimate question, "Does God exist, or not?" Because if He does, then I have to live my whole life oriented toward Him and in relationship to Him and responding to Him. So it's not just a theoretical question; it changes everything.

### **Creation—"Why is there something rather than nothing? Why am I here?"**

So, that's really where the Catechism starts. It talks about the beauty of creation. One of my majors in college at Marquette University was philosophy. How many of you have ever taken a philosophy class? Okay. You know how theoretical it is, right? I mean, you're talking about the essence of being and the accidents of being and metaphysics. And, I had all these classically trained Thomists at Marquette that are all dead now, but I had them at the end of their careers. Half the time I had no idea what they were talking about (laughing), but it was beautiful. Because essentially, philosophy is the study -- the ultimate study -- of reality. And philosophy always starts with this one question. It's a question of wonder. "Why is there something, rather than nothing? Why does anything exist at all? Why am I here? Why are you here?"

So I always say, "Science can explain the 'what' of what exists, but it can never get to the 'why'." Philosophy and theology, and ultimately faith, get us to the 'why.' Why are we

here? What's the point of all this? Is there a point? Or, are we just highly evolved animals who have reached the sophisticated level of existence; but, when we die, that's just the end. Our heart refuses to embrace that. And so, it's in our experience of God that we come to see that there is a reality beyond this world. I'm convinced every single one of us could stand up here and give testimony about how we have experienced the transcendent. How, somehow, God has reached into our experience and touched us and loved us and transformed us and has called us to Himself. So, the beauty of creation.

There are nights -- I love looking at the sky at night when you're away from the city. So, think of being in the Northwoods. And you look up at the sky, and it's just this sea of stars. And you think how tiny this world is, right? How tiny I am in this world; how beautiful this world is. But you think of the whole cosmos, and you think that God created all of this and holds it in being -- and that He loves me. And at that moment, I feel just like a little piece of dust. But, I'm a beloved piece of dust with an eternal destiny and so precious to God that He sent his Son into this world to save me and to lead me home.

### **Sacred Scripture-the Revelation of God or God Speaks to Us**

The Scriptures are the main source, the initial source of Revelation for us. The Catechism talks about how we come to encounter God in His living Word. And oftentimes our Protestant brothers and sisters know the Scriptures far better than we do. So, I just encourage you to read the Bible every day, if you don't already -- whether it's the readings for Mass, whether it's just reading sequentially the entire Bible. I have never... I've read the children's Bible all the way through, but never the full thing (laughing). But, my father, my father never went to high school -- he read the entire Bible from cover to cover twice. And, I was already a priest when he did that. And he always had all these questions, that I had no idea what the answer to was, from the Old Testament. There's some pretty wild and wooly things going on in the Old Testament. So if you've never read the Bible, start with the New Testament. (laughter) Start with the story of Jesus, right? It's an easier place to start, a beautiful place to grasp.

It's in the Scriptures then that God speaks to us. And this is important, because as Christians we believe that God is not simply this immutable, transcendent, immobile, unfeeling being suspended in the heavens, but that God has spoken to us. And that God's Word is so powerful and profound that God's Word actually takes on human flesh in the person of Jesus, and that God continues to speak to us. But that the Bible for us is the foundational source of God's revelation to us -- the inspired Word. It didn't just drop out of the sky; human beings wrote it. And, the Bible's really more a library than it is a book, because it is a collection of books written at very different times by different people,

struggling and grappling with different theological questions. And at the heart of the Bible, for us as Christians, are the four Gospels, right? The word 'gospel' means 'good news.' And, we have Mark, Matthew, Luke and John.

So when you think about it, Jesus never wrote the Scriptures, but He formed a community. He formed the church. It's the church that wrote the New Testament. And so, Mark's Gospel came first. If Jesus died around the year 30, Mark's Gospel is written about the year 60.

Why was it important that the story be written down at that point? What do you think? Why was it important that the story of Christ be written? Why was that essential? Yes? (response by audience member) He had to pass it on. So, all those first followers of Jesus started dying. Many of them were martyred for their faith. If it wasn't written down, it would be lost. But for thirty years, what we call the "oral tradition," the story of Christ was just passed down verbally. The apostles simply preached about their experience of Christ, told His parables, recounted His healings, proclaimed His death and resurrection. So, Mark's Gospel begins with Jesus' baptism.

Matthew's Gospel, which comes next, begins with Jesus' birth. Luke's Gospel, which comes next, begins with Jesus' conception. John's Gospel goes all the way back and says, "In the beginning was the Word..." Right? Before all of creation. So we see there the kind of the evolving nature of how the church reflected on the whole Christ event and came to a deeper understanding. Likewise, the word "Trinity" appears nowhere in the New Testament. You can read the whole New Testament, and you can't find the word "Trinity." So, the church pondered what Jesus revealed to us and realized that, if God the Father is God, and if Jesus is God, and if the Holy Spirit is God, there can only be one God. But Jesus reveals to us the mystery of the Trinity, the mystery of three persons within that one God. And, that's uniquely Christian. Jesus reveals the Trinity to us.

### **Tradition with a Capital "T" and Trinity - One God & Three Persons**

So, we have the blueprint of creation with God's fingerprints all over that. We have the power of the Scriptures in God's revelation to us in his Word. And as Catholics, we revere tradition with a capital "T." So, capital "T" Tradition is based on our conviction that God didn't stop speaking to the church once the Scriptures were written, but rather it's through the Tradition of the Church lived for 2,000 years that God continues to speak to us. And so, we think of the sacraments; we think of Church teaching; we think of the lives of the saints; we think of this whole, rich deposit of faith that we have received --

that this faith has been lived so powerfully for 2,000 years, and we're the heirs of that tradition. We're called to live it, and we're called to pass it on.

In the mystery of God, then, we see that He reveals himself as One, and also as three. And, it's in the mystery of the Trinity that we see God's fundamental three saving actions. God the Father is Creator. God the Son is Savior. God the Holy Spirit is Sanctifier. So, God the Father creates everything and holds it in being and is the source of all of life. God the Son, Jesus Christ, saves us from our sins and brings us into relationship with the Father. God the Holy Spirit is sent forth to sanctify us, to energize us and to effect within us that power of God's Grace. So in every Sacrament, we invoke the power of the Holy Spirit as the active agent of that Sacrament here and now. So, the Catechism explores that whole mystery of the Trinity.

### **The FALL: Before and After**

Then we ponder our wonder of existence as human beings. And we see in the Book of Genesis that God created man and woman as the crown of his creation, right? That we have a soul, that we are made in God's image and likeness, and that our destiny and our purpose is to be in relationship with the Lord.

When you read Genesis in its original Hebrew form, it's clear that the author is using the language of the temple and the high priesthood to define and explain creation. It's the idea that the world is the temple and that Adam is the high priest who names all of the creatures. And so, the world is this sacred place where Adam and Eve live as the crown of God's creation, before original sin, before everything falls apart.

But because God loves us, He doesn't force himself upon us, right? So, into our humanity is interwoven the great mystery of human freedom, which means we are free to accept God or reject God, to live in relationship with God or not. And we see in that original sin the horrible consequences when Adam and Eve reach out to grasp the forbidden fruit. So, what is that story really about? The forbidden fruit is on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And when the devil tempts Adam and Eve to consume that fruit, the lie there, the real deception there, is him insinuating into their minds and hearts the idea that you don't really need God. You don't really need to be in relationship with God. You can be your own gods. You can make your own decisions about what's right and wrong. And if you just throw God off, then you'll find true freedom, that somehow God is not your liberator and your Father; God is an oppressor. That's the deception of what the serpent plants in the mind and heart of Adam and Eve. And they fall for it; and they eat the forbidden fruit. And at that moment, the original world as God created it shatters.

I grew up in a family of six boys. And to survive our childhoods, my mother and father had some basic rules in the house. And one of them was you couldn't throw anything in the living room. That's a really good rule, don't you think? (laughing) We have six kids. So, I'm four years old. I'm watching television, minding my own business, I must say. And my brother Will comes in and throws a football to me. I instinctively throw it back to him, only it hits one of my mother's porcelain vases, which was a wedding gift, on the wall. It breaks not into seven pieces; it breaks into, like, 75 pieces. Now at the age of four I had never read the book of Genesis, (laughter) but I immediately did what Adam did after the original sin; I ran upstairs and hid under my bed. (laughter) And that's what Adam does, right? He goes and hides. That was just my instinctive response. It's built into our DNA. My mother comes upstairs, pulls me out from under the dust bunnies, confronts me with the deed. Again, I immediately do what Adam did next; I blamed my brother, you know? He did it; he threw the ball to me.

So when I think of the fractured world that original sin originally created, I think of my mother's shattered vase. Because I disobeyed the rule, I shattered that vase. When we refuse to live in obedience and in relationship with God, we shatter the integrity of our life, and we shatter that relationship that saves us. So the meaning of Original Sin is that it's in us now -- that this disordered desire to be our own god -- to live not in relationship with God, but really to be self-sufficient, you know? I'm good on my own; I can make it on my own. I'm all right; I don't really need God.

But God doesn't give up on us, does he? Even when Adam and Eve get expelled from the garden. We see in the Old Testament the power of the establishment of the Covenant of the chosen people. So that the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the covenant with David, the covenant that's made manifest in the journey of the Israelites toward the Promised Land. And that whole covenant is really replete with marital imagery -- that God wants to be in this love relationship with us, that He never gives up on humanity. He never gives up on us. And through the chosen people, the Jewish people, He continues the dream of healing and saving the world.

### **The Covenant Begins**

So, Jesus comes from the Jewish people. And for us as Christians, Jesus is the culmination and the fulfillment of the Old Testament. I'm always amazed whenever I study Judaism how much it enriches my understanding of Catholicism. You really can't understand our Catholic faith unless you really, seriously study the Jewish faith. And Pope Pius XI said, "The Jews are our elder brothers and sisters, because it's from them that we received Jesus. It's through them that we live the fullness of the New Covenant."

So when we think of Christianity, then, we realize that God sends into the world, into this fractured, broken world of sin and death (death is the fruit of sin), this broken world of violence and poverty and hatred and sin and death the fullness of Himself in the person of his Son. So Christianity is the only world religion that believes that the immortal, invisible, transcendent, all-powerful, mysterious God enters into His own creation as one of His own creatures. Isn't that amazing?! That's what we ponder at Christmas -- that the immortal, invisible, all-powerful God loves us so much that He enters into our humanity and saves us from inside our own human experience.

I don't mean this to sound heretical or overly human, but the way I try to understand this, I imagine the Father, Son and Holy Spirit talking among themselves and looking down at the world and seeing all the suffering, all the violence, all the sin, all the death. And the Father says, "They really don't get it, do they?"

And the Holy Spirit says, "No. They're lost. They're afraid of us. They don't know us. They don't understand why they exist. They don't understand."

And I hear the Father say, "One of us has to go down there. One of us has to go down there!"

And I imagine the Son raising his hand and saying, "Father, I'll go." Right? "Father, I'll go."

### **Jesus and the Word Made Flesh**

So, the whole Christ event becomes this mission of mercy by which God heals, forgives, restores and saves everything within us that's broken, sinful and dead. So when we speak of the Kerygma – “Kerygma” is a big, fancy word for the elevator speech if somebody said, “Explain Christianity in thirty seconds; what is that?” Kerygma is essentially this: God made us and has destined us for eternal life. Sin has fractured that relationship. In Jesus Christ, God restores us to that original integrity and purpose, and we are now called as Christians to give witness to that saving Gospel to others. That we have come to discover Jesus is Lord and Savior. And, we want every person we know to live in that Lordship of our Savior, as well -- and enter into that relationship.

We should never get over the wonder of the incarnation, the wonder of Christmas. That the Word becomes flesh. That in Jesus, then, we see God reconciling the world.

Saint Paul talks about the power of reconciliation, and that the mission of Jesus is to put together all the broken pieces, all the broken pieces of our humanity, reconciling us to

God, reconciling us to each other, and healing everything within us that's broken, sinful and dead. Jesus Christ already begins that simply by assuming our flesh. So, Jesus Christ is the fullness of God and the fullness of our humanity brought together in one divine person.

So, you either believe that, or you don't, right?

Jesus comes back to Nazareth, and He gets up and He reads the passage from Isaiah that is essentially the job description of the Messiah. This passage from Isaiah the Jews have been studying for hundreds of years, hoping that one day the Messiah would come and usher in this Messianic age of salvation. And Nazareth is this tiny little town, and they all know Jesus. They grew up with him. He comes back fresh from his Baptism, reads that passage and says, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

In other words, this passage that we have all been studying, reflecting on and hoping for, for hundreds of years -- they're talking about me. I'm the Messiah.

Imagine somebody growing up in Potosi, Wisconsin, because that's kind of what it would be like – Potosi or New Diggings – and this person that you've known his whole life suddenly standing up and saying, "I'm the Messiah; I'm the Savior; I'm the One." No wonder they struggle with it, right?

The scandal of particularity is how some theologians call it, that in this one person, living at one time in this one place, the fullness of God is revealed to us and made manifest.

So if we dare to believe that and stake our life on it, it changes everything. Because, it means that God is with us, and that God lives inside of us, and that God is here. He's not somewhere else. He's right here.