

YOU CAN'T LOVE WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW; A VERY BASIC CATHOLIC READING LIST

◆ *The Holy Bible*—The best translation is the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition. The important thing is to be sure that you are using a Catholic Bible because Protestant Bibles are very different.

◆ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*—While I recommend the book form of this, it is also available online. Every family needs a Bible and a *Catechism*. If you can't afford it, let me know and I will get them for you.

◆ *Theology for Beginners* by Frank Sheed and *Theology and Sanity*—Both books provide a basic understanding of the nature of the soul and how we are made in the image of God. These books also introduce some ways of thinking about the Trinity. They are elementary to our faith and the second book is a kind of sequel to the first.

◆ *The Light of Christ; An Introduction to Catholicism* by Fr. Thomas Joseph White—This book has the advantage of being written very recently. It is an intelligent presentation that I think is still very accessible and does not discount the Trinity which is the central mystery of the Christian faith and that illumines all the other mysteries (CCC 234).

◆ *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis—C.S. Lewis was not a Catholic but his Christianity is catholic and these books have sold in millions of copies which is proof of his insight. The latter of these two works may be especially helpful for older boys and young men.

We live in a Protestant nation, although the whole of the developed world is secularized. This presents its own challenges, sometimes in subtle ways. Some answers and understanding may be attained by reading *The Apostasy That Wasn't* by Rod Bennet and *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* by Karl Keating among other things.

Then there are the certain writers who are so wise, so close to God that it seems everything they have written is well worth spending time with. These include Archbishop Fulton Sheen whose cause for sainthood is in the Vatican, Josef Pieper, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), and Romano Guardini, to name some. I especially recommend *The Life of Christ* (by Sheen), *The Four Cardinal Virtues, Leisure as the Basis for Culture* (Pieper), *Introduction to Christianity*, and *Spirit of the Liturgy* (Ratzinger).

Having an understanding of natural law is extremely useful for Christians. Charles Rice, a former professor at Notre Dame Law School wrote *50 Questions on Natural Law; What It Is and Why We Need It*. J. Budziszewski has also written several good books on natural law and see Pierre Manent.

GOING TO MASS (VERY IMPORTANT!)

The Catholic Mass is sometimes difficult. When the Mass is “dumbed down” to cater to perceived popular tastes, it becomes banal and boring. To the extent this happens, everyone is robbed. On the other hand, we don't attend Mass for what we get out of it — a selfish disposition. We go to give God the worship He is due in justice according to the manner of worship that He has instituted no matter how poorly we may execute His precepts. The Mass ought to be a holy and loving experience. To help us enter the Mass with greater intentionality, we need to deepen our understanding. Basic introductions are *Understanding the Mass* by Charles Belmonte or *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass; Understanding What We Say and Do...* by Edward Sri, and *What Happens at Mass* by Driscoll.

To receive Holy Communion worthily, we must be in a “state of grace”. This is achieved through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which is also called Confession. This sacrament is often neglected but it is necessary for our salvation. There are several good books available on this topic but it would be helpful to simply read with serious intent what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says about it. One classic on this sacrament is *Frequent Confession; Its Place In the Spiritual Life* by Benedict Bauer.

UNDERSTANDING MARY IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

To help understand the place of Mary, the Mother of Jesus in our spiritual life, we could start with a straightforward little book by Scott Hahn called *Hail Holy Queen; the Mother of God In the Word of God*. Books on the level of apologetics include *Refuting the Attack on Mary; A Defense of Marian Doctrines* by Father Mateo or *Behold Your Mother; A Biblical and Historical Defense of Marian Doctrines*. Going deeper in the spirituality of Mary, we can think about Luigi S. Gambero's book *Mary and the Fathers of the Church; the Blessed Virgin Mary In Patristic Thought* or *True Devotion to Mary* by St. Louis de Montfort or *Mary: God's Yes to Man* by Pope St. John Paul II.

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UNDERSTANDING PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

A very good, short introduction to prayer is *Thirsting for Prayer* by Fr. Jacques Philippe. He also wrote *Searching for and Maintaining Peace* and other treatises that are simple and substantive. The most widely read devotional book is by Thomas à Kempis called *Imitation of Christ*. An excellent synthesis of the spiritual life is *The Fire Within* by Fr. Thomas Dubay (there are many things with that title, be careful to get the book by Fr. Dubay). Perhaps the greatest introduction to the spiritual life was written by the great saint and doctor of the Church, St. Francis de Sales who wrote *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

Saints are the most reliable witnesses in matters of the spirit. *The Diary of St. Faustina; Divine Mercy In My Soul* is an eyewitness testimony to the mercy of the Lord. St. Thérèse of Lisieux is famous for her spirituality, told in her autobiography *Story of a Soul* and also in her letters. One must be patient, however, to appreciate the depth of St. Thérèse's writing because of the style of expression of her time, but countless holy people have benefitted from her "little way" including St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Reading the lives of the saints is another very important source of information and inspiration in the spiritual life. It is especially effective for young people and it provides not only some theology but the drama of their story as well as some history and culture.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

It is essential for both spouses to constantly revitalize their appreciation for each other. One important way of stimulating the graces of the Sacrament of Matrimony is to pray with your spouse and to conscientiously work at love as a skill. It is ideal if this disposition is present from the very beginning of marriage.

Hidden Keys to a Loving, Lasting Marriage by Gary Smalley and *The 5 Love Languages; the Secret to Love that Lasts* by Gary Chapman are books by Christians which offer very practical advice. Another very good book that is secular in its character is *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John M. Gottman. Dr. Gottman has done outstanding work. Managers in business still use the protopsychological methods of the ancient Greeks in leadership and management theory. You can use these in your family by reading *The Temperament God Gave You* by Art and Laraine Bennett.

Pope St. John Paul II wrote *Love and Responsibility* and *Man and Woman He Created Them; a Theology of the Body*. Those two books may be too academic for some people. But whatever you do, make

sure you commit to that conscious, reflective spiritual investment in your marriage.

A FEW MORE CONSIDERATIONS

It may be helpful to round out our catechesis with some moral theology. Certainly, our kids will have questions. *Introduction to Moral Theology* by Romanus Cessario is recommended as is the one by William C. Mattison III which is easier. You might be interested in *Catholic Sexual Ethics* by May, Lawler and Boyle or *Catholic Sexual Morality* by Fastiggi.

One can be very simple or very sophisticated and still find endless treasures in the teachings handed down through the ages. However, as John Paul II wrote in *Faith and Reason*, it helps very much to learn some classical metaphysics in order to penetrate some of the deeper things. *What Is; Introductory Reflections on Thomistic Metaphysics* by Michael Torre or *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* by Joseph Owens may be of service to you in that regard.

It really helps to have things laying around the house that people can just pick up and read, especially if you have kids. Subscribing to a Catholic newspaper, magazine or journal helps to see the Church active in the world and unafraid to address the challenge of current issues. Often the headlines or titles in these periodicals are sufficient to provoke thought. That alone is valuable. Subscribe to *The National Catholic Register* or *Catholic Answers* magazine.

There are countless resources online. The non-profit Catholic Answers owns the domain www.catholic.com. I generally recommend that site for basic apologetic questions. There are other popular sites but even good websites can take people down some tangled trails, so to speak. I have tried to compile things here that are consonant with the orthodox, historical teaching of the Church and her understanding of herself. We understand things not by adhering to our opinion but by yielding to fact. Also, reading books is better than the using websites, generally, if for no other reason than finding the depth of material that is commensurate to your intelligence.

I concede that no one really reads anymore. I "stick to my guns" though, for several reasons. Many studies and meta-analysis show that, not only is it healthy to read, but paper books are better than digital devices for comprehension and retention. It is good for your children that you read too. Reading makes us better.

For this reason, I bring an end to my reading list by recommending a book on book-reading itself. Consider the great *How to Read a Book* by Mortimer Adler.

—Fr. Gerald