

Preliminary Chapter I.

Importance Of The Catechism

Translated From The French By Mrs. J. Sadlier.

Anecdotes Pamphlet No.ca002

1. Esdras (or Ezra) reading the Holy Scriptures. - Catechism, my dear friends, is no ordinary science, and it must not be heard like a profane lesson. The same attention and the same respect must be brought to it which the Jews brought to the reading of the law of God by Esdras, on the return from the Babylonian captivity, 536 years before Christ. That unhappy nation was then reduced to fifty-four thousand individuals, who returned to Judea under the guidance of Zorobabel. The first care of Esdras, - who was one of their most distinguished priests and doctors, - was to remind them of the law of God, which they had unhappily too much forgotten during their long exile. For that purpose, a wooden platform was erected on the street fronting on the Water Gate, in Jerusalem; Esdras ascended it, and the multitude gathered around with devout eagerness. It was the first day of the seventh month; Esdras had brought with him an old manuscript, in which were contained the books of Moses. When he saw that all were silent and attentive, he opened that venerable book, and began to read slowly, clearly, and distinctly. Scarcely had he pronounced the first words when all present stood up, - men and women, the young and the old, - through respect for the Word of God. And so they remained, motionless, from six o'clock in the morning till it was almost noon-day. When Esdras had finished, each withdrew in silence, resolving to be faithful in discharging the precepts of the Lord, so as one day to be partakers of His great reward. And that is just how you, my dear friends, ought to hear the Catechism all the year long; we shall see who will be most faithful to this duty. - II. ESDRAS, chap. viii. (Nehemiah chap. 8)

2. The Disciple of Zeno. - It is not enough, my dear friends, to assist at the Catechism; it is not even enough to hear and retain it, what is learned must also be put in practice. That reminds me of a story more than two thousand years old. A youth who had been placed at the school of Zeno, a famous Greek philosopher, returned home after some time. "Well!" said his father, "what good have you learned of your philosopher?" "Father, you will soon see," modestly answered the young disciple, without adding another word. His father, taking his silence for an acknowledgement of the little progress he had made in his studies, flies into a furious passion, and beats him unmercifully: "Wretch! have you, then, lost all your time? Is this the fruit of all the expense I have been at for your education?" The poor youth, far from being moved to anger, bore all with patience, and when his father's wrath began to subside "Well! father," said he, with mildness and submission, "there is what I learned at the school of Zeno; you see I have not lost my time, since I have become better." - FILASSIER, Dictionnaire d'Education, II, 333.

3. How St. Dorotheus Studied. - Do you know how you ought to study your lessons, especially your Catechism? I am going to tell you, my dear children, or rather, I am going to let St. Dorotheus tell you, and he was one of the most learned Abbots of the deserts of Palestine, who lived in the fourth century. "When I was in the world," says he, "I had acquired such a taste for study, that I thought of

nothing else; I would often have forgotten even to eat, if one of my friends had not taken the trouble of coming in search of me at the hour of meals. My passion for learning went so far, that at table I had always an open book before me, so that I studied and eat at the same time. In the evening, as soon as I returned from class, I hastened to light my lamp, took some refreshment, then shut myself up in my room till near midnight. Then, when I went to bed, I took my book with me, hid it under my bolster, and if I chanced to wake during the night, I resumed my book, and read as long as I was able. So it was that I acquired a little learning and some eloquence; alas! if I had only been as ardent to acquire virtue, I should long ago have been a Saint." Such, my dear children, is the history of St. Dorotheus; when shall we display as much eagerness in learning our Catechism and other lessons, as he did in the studies of his youth? - RODRIGUEZ, Practice of Christian Perfection, I. 109.

4. The Picture Gained at Catechism. - Oh! how happy I should be if there were amongst you, my little friends, many children like him whose story I am about to tell you! He was a German. One day, the parish priest was explaining the Catechism in church; this little boy, who was not quite six years old, chanced to be present with the others who were old enough to learn. He was taught to make the sign of the cross, and a picture was given him in order to encourage him. Little Christopher, much rejoiced, hastened to show his picture to every one; but his father, being a Protestant, was not so well pleased as he was; he even threatened to beat him cruelly, if he did not tear the picture to pieces, and promise never to go to Catechism again. The courageous child chose rather to bear his father's harsh treatment than to tear his picture or make such a promise. A week passed without any more being said; but, on the following Sunday, as soon as the bell rang for Catechism, Christopher was hurrying away, when the father, perceiving it, caused the door to be locked, and ordered him on no account to go out; but the child never ceased crying and beseeching till they had to open the door, when he ran immediately to Catechism, and never after missed it. Nor did his father seek any more to prevent him, because he perceived that the sweet child was wiser and more obedient since he went there. Do you in like manner, my young friends, and every one will be pleased with you: the good God, your parents, your pastors, your teachers, and yourselves. - ABBE NOEL, Catechisme de Rodez, I. 22.

5. Diderot Teaching the Catechism. - The Catechism is something so fine and at the same time so necessary, that impious "philosophers" themselves have had a high idea of it. Amongst others, I can quote the example of Diderot, who was one of the greatest enemies of religion in the 18th century. He undertook to teach the Catechism himself to his daughter, who was only ten or twelve years old; he obliged her, moreover, to learn every week the Gospel and perhaps the Epistle for the Sunday. One day when he was occupied in making her recite it, in came one of his friends, a "philosopher" like himself. The new comer, much amazed, began to laugh and make merry over what he saw: "How!" said he to Diderot, "is it possible? You are teaching your daughter the Catechism! You are, then, no longer a "philosopher"?" - "Why certainly," replied Diderot, well convinced of what he said, "I make Marie learn both the Catechism and the Gospel. Is there anything better that I could teach her, to make her a good girl, a devoted woman, a kind and affectionate mother?" - FILASSIER, Dictionnaire d'Education, I. 687.

6. The Martyr of the Catechism. - Who would believe that there are generous Christians who would rather die than part with their Catechism? Here is a striking instance of the kind, which took place in France, about the year 1792, if I am not mistaken. Jean Chantebel, a farmer, residing in the village of Du Chene, in the diocese of Rennes, knew the principles of his religion; but he loved to read and study them over and over in the small Catechism he had learned in his youth. That book,

so precious to faith, was his crime. Evil men, who hated our good farmer because he would not become a schismatic like them at the time of the Revolution, found it in his house, and that was sufficient to secure his arrest. A committee assembles, and orders the Catechism to be burned. A pyre is erected with much pomp; Chantebel is brought forward, and they read to him the sentence passed on his book and himself. He is to take the torch presented to him, and set fire to the Catechism. "I will never do it," said he with energy; "that book contains the principles of my faith, and you will never get me to renounce it." They threaten him, but he remains inflexible. One of the brigands seizes the flaming torch and applies it to the hand of the generous confessor. "Oh! you may burn not only my hand," said Chantebel, "but my whole body before I will consent to commit an act unworthy of my religion." The brigands, confused and disconcerted, consulted amongst themselves. A new warrant decrees that he shall be conducted ignominiously through the streets of Martigny, mounted on a horse, the tail of which he is to hold in his hand. He shows not the least reluctance: his aspect mild and serene amid the hootings of the populace who escort him on his way, announces the tranquillity that reigns within. Amongst the crowd attracted by the sight, was found Chantebel's own wife. She approaches him, and in words of sublime simplicity cries out - "Bear it all bravely; it is for the good God, and He will reward you." Behold what was endured for the sake of their Catechism by these poor peasants, because they knew that to attack the Catechism is to attack religion itself. - ABBE REYRE, Christian Anecdotes, 476.

7. A Colonel's Small Catechism. - How happy you are, dear children, to learn the Catechism as you do! There are learned men, doctors, many great persons who do not know as much of it as you do. In this connection, I remember the story of Colonel de B--. He was a worthy man, as the phrase goes; but not over well versed in theology. One day he begged permission of the Superior of a religious house to make a short retreat under his direction. Being admitted the first book placed in his hand was the Small Catechism. "How, father! do you want to put me back to A B C?" "I am far from thinking of such a thing, Colonel! but I fear that you may have forgotten some of your Catechism." - "Oh! never fear, father! I know my religion; I had learned the Catechism all through before I was ten years old." - "An additional reason, Colonel! for the longer it is since you learned your Catechism, the greater your need to refresh your memory. Take that little book, read it attentively, and you shall speak of it to me this evening." - "Why not speak of it now, instead of this evening, father? Question me, and you shall see." Accordingly, the Superior did put some questions to him. It was not hard to puzzle the Colonel; he made even some gross blunders; thus he knew not whether there was in Christ one or two natures; he confounded satisfaction with restitution, etc., etc. At last, he had the good sense and candour to admit that he had been in the wrong; he took the Catechism, went over it carefully, and made an excellent retreat. - LASSAUSSE, Explanation of the Catechism of the Empire, 9.

8. How some of the Chinese Hear the Catechism. - I know children who are apparently very decorous during Catechism; they do not stir, they seem to listen, and yet they pay no attention to what is said. Do you know who they are like, my young friends? They are like certain ones among the Chinese or the Siamese, and I will tell you how. I have read in the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith, that on a certain day a zealous missionary had been exhorting his hearers in the most fervent manner; they all appeared very attentive and the good missionary rejoiced exceedingly. Being anxious to know, however, what amount of fruit they had gathered from his instruction, he asked one of the oldest amongst them what was it that had particularly struck him during the instruction. "What struck me most," replied this singular hearer, "was that your nose is very long!" Another, to whom the Father put nearly the same question, answered simply: "Father, you have such

pretty buttons on your soutane that I can never tire of looking at them." And so it sometimes happens to yourselves, children; you amuse yourselves looking at something that takes your attention, and you do not hear what is said to you. Try for the future not to resemble those little Chinese. - Annals of the Propagation of the Faith.

9. Napoleon Turned Catechist. - You have all heard of the Emperor Napoleon the Great, but, perhaps, you do not know that he took pleasure in teaching the Catechism on his island of exile, the island of St. Helena. It happened as follows: General Bertrand, his faithful companion in captivity, had a daughter about ten years old. One day the Emperor met her, and said - "My child, you are young, and many dangers await you in the world. What will become of you, if you are not fortified by Religion? Come to me tomorrow, and I will give you your first lesson in Catechism." For more than two years she went every day to the Emperor's quarters, where he heard her recite her Catechism, and explained it to her with the utmost care and precision. When she had attained her sixteenth year, Napoleon said to her: "Now, my child, I believe you are sufficiently instructed in religion; it is time to think seriously of your first Communion. (You must remember, this was in the time before the great Saint, Pope Pius X, encouraged children to make their first Communion on reaching the age of reason.) I am going to have two priests brought hither from France, one who will prepare you to live well, and the other will teach me to die well." It was done accordingly, and this pious young lady who, as one might say, owed both her faith and her happiness to the Emperor Napoleon the Great, herself related these details to the bishop who assisted him in his last moments, in the month of August, 1845. - Recompenses hebdomadaires (Daily Rewards), No. XLVI., p. 10.

10. Of what use is the Catechism? - Do you wish to know, children, of what use the Catechism is to you? Hear a story which interested me much when I read it. A gentleman, whose name I do not remember, had a little girl of eight years old, who already attended Catechism. She listened attentively to the instructions, and tried hard to put all she remembered of them in practice. Her father fell dangerously ill. Seeing that no one ventured to warn him that he ought to receive the last sacraments, little Celestine thought she would do it herself, in order that she might meet him again in heaven. "My dear papa," said she, when she found herself alone with him for a moment, "you are very sick; I heard it said at Catechism that it is a great sin to die without Confession, and that then one cannot go to heaven. I would be very sorry if you died in that way, and you see no one dares to tell you that you ought to make your Confession." - "I thank you, my dear child." said her father, "go immediately and bring me the priest. God bless you, I will owe my salvation to you!" The pastor came and administered to the sick man, who died next day. Before dying, he repeated several times: "Only for my dear child, what would have become of me for all eternity?" - NOEL, Catechisme de Rodez, I., 23.

11. Must we Believe what the Catechism says? - I once read, in a book translated from the German, a circumstance that impressed me very much. It relates to what the Catechism teaches us. It occurred in the United States. The daughter of an officer of rank, {This officer was Colonel Ethan Allen, the hero of Ticonderoga. - Trans.} who passed for an atheist and an unbeliever, fell dangerously ill. It was on the night of the 12th-13th November, 1827. The poor girl appeared to have but a few moments to live. She sent for her father to her bedside, and taking him by the hand faintly addressed him in these words: "My dear father, I am going to die very soon: tell me seriously, then, I entreat you, whether I am to believe what you have so often told me, that there is neither God, nor heaven, nor hell, - or, what I learned in the Catechism that my mother taught me?" The father was thunderstruck; he remained for some moments silent, with his eyes fixed on his

expiring daughter. His heart appeared to be torn by some violent struggle; at length he approached the bed, and said in a choking voice: " My child, my dear child, believe only what your mother taught you!" The astonishment of the unbelievers who heard him may easily be imagined. One of them who had long before abjured his religion, being asked what he thought, replied that it was more pleasant to live according to his new religion, but it was better to die in the old. There, my dear children, is how the impious themselves regard the Catechism at the final hour of death. - Schmid et Belet, Cat. Hist., II., 47.

12. The Ship Captain who Forgot his Catechism. - I would never come to an end, children, if I were to tell you all the stories I know of the ignorance of those who have forgotten their Catechism. It sometimes happens that they make the most singular blunders. I knew an excellent priest of the Department of Vars (in France), who told the following anecdote in one of our boarding-schools: He made a pilgrimage once to the chapel of Notre Dame de Grace (Our Lady of Grace), near Honfleurs, a shrine much venerated by seafaring people. One day he had said Mass there, and was engaged in making his thanksgiving, when a sailor, coming up, pulled him by the soutane, and said to him: "Reverend Father, our captain has just got into the chapel; he wanted to hear Mass; wouldn't you have the kindness to begin yours again for him?" - "But, my friend, I cannot say two Masses on the same day; that can only be done on Christmas Day." (Such was the Church Discipline in those times.) The sailor brought back this answer to the captain, but the latter, thinking that the Father Almoner only refused to say Mass because he was tired, went to him himself and said: "Reverend Father, I know you must be fatigued, but I am in no hurry; do me the honour to come and breakfast with me and then you will be better able to say Mass."

The priest who related the story had much trouble to make the ignorant captain understand that a priest cannot say two Masses on the same day, and that he must be fasting from midnight to say one. (Such again was the discipline of the times.) This story makes you laugh, my young friends, but it proves to you, at the same time, that people are liable to say absurd and ridiculous things when they are not well instructed in their religion. You will be pleased to know that the Father in question was able to find, at the nearby monastery, a young priest who had not yet said his Mass, and was able to satisfy the good-hearted, but ignorant captain with a most devout Mass. - G. S. G.

13. The Dead Sailor Thrown in the Sea. - Another story, dear children, on the danger of being ignorant of the Catechism. It was related, not long since, to pupils in one of our boarding-schools. A French merchant vessel, returning from America, had the misfortune to lose one of her crew. Now, when any one dies at sea, the body cannot be kept, on account of its corrupting so soon; neither can it be buried, the land being so far off. So it is sewed up in canvas, and cast into the ocean. I remember one of our Brothers being buried in this way, in 1857, precisely on his way back from America. Well! to return to our sailor, they wrapped him up in canvas, and set about committing him to the deep. They wanted to say some prayers first, and as there was no priest, each one gave his opinion. One said it would be well to recite a Pater and Ave. "That's too common," said another, "better say a Miserere," "That's too long," objected a third, " let us say the Tantum Ergo." These poor fellows were so ignorant that they never thought of saying the De Profundis, and contented themselves with the Tantum Ergo, which, as you know, my friends, is sung when the Blessed Sacrament is to be exposed. Had they known their religion better, they would not have been so embarrassed. - G. S. G.
