

As you may know, last week an estimated 50,000 Catholics came together in Indianapolis for the *National Eucharistic Congress*. With that in mind, it's fitting that we begin the first of five consecutive weeks in which we hear from chapter 6 of John's Gospel. It begins by referencing the Jewish Passover feast and Jesus' feeding of the hungry crowd. It all points so clearly to the Eucharist we are celebrating.

Last week, I mentioned the Pew Survey conducted 5 years ago, which revealed that of the 11,000 Catholics surveyed, that only 31% believed that the Eucharist is truly Jesus' Body and Blood. I rhetorically asked what the cause might be for such unbelief, and today I'll begin to answer that question.

For sure, part of the cause is the secularization of American society. The figures that we've come to call the New Atheists have made great inroads in planting the seeds of skepticism and disbelief about whether there's a God at all.

But I also believe it can also be attributed to our 'catechesis', our passing on and teaching of the faith. Among the principal things we are called to do as Christian people is to care for the poor; second, we are to worship our God, to be people of prayer; but third, we are to know and share the teachings of our faith.

The Pew Survey asked Catholics if they understand what the Church teaches about the Eucharist, that bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. The responses showed a correlation, in that the majority of those who think the Eucharist is just a symbol, and not Jesus' True Presence, are not aware of Church teaching on it.

Maybe it's fair to say that too many Catholics are woefully uninformed, and therefore we can't begin to share what we ourselves do not have, whether to our own children or anyone else. Ask yourself: *In the past year, how much time have I devoted to learning about my faith? Do I give more time to watching sports and using social media, than I do in either prayer or learning about our faith?*

Some of you remember when Catholics learned from the *Baltimore Catechism*. Often, people critique that it was merely memorization and regurgitation of formulated questions and answers, that didn't lead to a living interior faith; that it was all in the head, and not in the heart.

But then we shifted to a style of learning that I've sometimes heard characterized as having been reduced to making banners out of felt with cutouts of peace-doves and letters that say things like, "*God loves me*". I've heard some people say, that was pretty much the extent of their Catholic faith formation after we threw away the Baltimore Catechism.

Perhaps it can be fairly stated that our catechetical method went from being overly structured to having no structure. The fallout, as some have proposed, is that we have a couple generations of Catholics who were never taught the faith and therefore have no ability to articulate it or share it with the next generation.

*So how does one go about engaging all this to learn about it?* For all the ways our mobile devices and computers can demand too much of our energy and focus, for the ways they can be merely a source of distraction or even at times, and for the ways that can be used in ways that lead us to spiritual harm, they also can be a great means of engaging things that help us to pray and also help us to learn about our faith—whether it's videos and podcasts from folks like Fr. Mike Schmitz, Sr. Miriam James Heidland, Bishop Barron, Fr. Casey Cole and many others. It's all right there, and most of it's free.

I've found that those who are apathetic to the faith, and those who tend to fall away from the Church, tend to be those who never developed a desire as an adult, to learn what's beautiful and meaningful about our faith.

Having stressed the importance of coming to know and therefore share the faith, I realize that belief in Jesus' True Presence in the Eucharist is more than merely an intellectual endeavor—it requires faith in

something beyond natural human reason. But there's no question: The more one comes to know their faith and engage it in their consciousness—whether you have children or not—it provides a platform to nurture belief.

I'll continue next week, addressing another prevalent cause for disbelief in this food from heaven that Jesus gives. Along with serving the poor, and worshiping our God, if we don't engage and learn, the fires of our faith will cool, and the gift of the Eucharist—Jesus' very gift of himself—will be evermore lost on us.