

JOE PAPROCKI

A WELL-BUILT FAITH



A CATHOLIC'S GUIDE TO
KNOWING AND SHARING
WHAT WE BELIEVE

From the
best-selling
author of
*The Catechist's
Toolbox*

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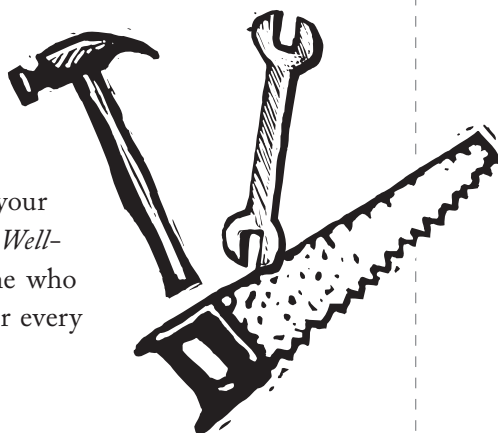
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INTRODUCTION—A LITTLE H.E.L.P.

The Right Tools and a Firm Foundation

I was getting my tires changed on my car one day and, as I sat in the waiting room at the auto mechanic, I noticed something interesting. There before me was an entire wall filled with framed certificates for all of the mechanics on duty. It seems that they had been trained in the knowledge and skills needed to service cars properly. They had not only learned how to use the right tools as mechanics, but they had also, through their training, acquired a firm foundation for getting the job done properly. What was even more impressive was that some of the mechanics who had been working there for some time had continued to compile certificates. As technology and cars progressed and changed, so too did the mechanics.

We Catholics seek to be people who have the right tools and a firm foundation to serve God and others. How do we do this? Through faith formation. Catechesis is the process through which we become equipped with the right tools and a firm foundation to live out our baptism. This is a process that is never finished—it is ongoing and lifelong. We all need to start somewhere. That's where *A Well-Built Faith: A Catholic's Guide to Knowing and Sharing What We Believe* comes in. This book is designed to give you a firm foundation to get started in a lifelong process of developing a well-built faith. Whether you are a catechist, a liturgical minister, a parish pastoral council member, a catechumen or candidate in the RCIA, or an everyday Catholic trying to remain faithful to your baptismal call and grow closer to the Lord, *A Well-Built Faith* is designed for you, “so that the one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17).



A firm foundation provides support for that which is built upon it. In ancient times, pillars provided the support for mammoth structures that would otherwise collapse under the weight of tons of building materials. When it comes to our faith, the Catholic Church has arranged a vast array of doctrines and beliefs into a somewhat mammoth structure we know as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This structure is supported by four pillars, which provide a firm foundation for our faith.

1. The Creed

2. The Sacraments

3. The Moral Life

4. A Life of Prayer

This simple organization of over 2000 years of a living Tradition provides us with easy access to

our faith. At the same time, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, at over 900 pages long, was not written with the average Catholic as its targeted reader. Rather, it was written as a reference book for bishops and for those who teach the Catholic faith. With that in mind, the

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is arranged in four parts: “The Profession of Faith”; “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery”; “Life in Christ”; and “Christian Prayer.”

(USCC FOR ADULTS, PG. XVII)

bishops of the United States produced a more readable resource, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (2006), which follows the organization of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Even so, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* weighs in at over 600 pages, still a daunting task for many readers. Catholics continue to ask for help in learning about their faith in a way that makes it accessible. With this book, *A Well-Built Faith*, help has arrived.

A Little H.E.L.P.

Shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, there was a great deal of tension between Muslims and non-Muslims in many parts of the United States. In an effort to respond to the situation with Gospel values, I invited the Imam of a local Muslim community in the Chicago suburbs to meet with a number of catechetical leaders from the surrounding Catholic parishes for

a dialogue. He agreed and the catechetical leaders were excited to have an opportunity to participate in a positive interreligious experience.

A week before the meeting, the Imam called me and said that he regretted that he would not be able to attend, but that he would send a representative in his place. At the meeting, the catechetical leaders and I listened as this gracious gentleman explained the basic precepts of Islam in a very straightforward manner. When all was said and done, I thanked him for joining us and sharing his knowledge of Islam with us. I asked him what his position at the mosque was. He laughed and said, “Oh, no, I do not work at the Mosque. I own a video store on 95th Street!” I was flabbergasted, as were those standing nearby who overheard. We thought he was the Muslim equivalent of a catechetical leader or an associate pastor in a Catholic parish. In essence what had happened was the “pastor” (the Imam) had invited one of his “parishioners” to speak about Islam in his place!

Could you do the same if your pastor asked you to represent him at a meeting of non-Catholics who wanted to learn more about the Catholic faith?

I’ve asked this question to numerous groups of Catholics, especially catechists, and the number of people who feel they would have the right tools to represent the Catholic faith properly is extremely low. Why is this? Is the Catholic faith so complex that we cannot summarize it in some simple ways? Muslims can speak of the five pillars of Islam—the five duties required of every Muslim—and Buddhists can speak of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

So, what can Catholics speak of? For the answer to that, we can go to the four pillars of our Catholic faith, as outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. If someone were to ask us to explain the Catholic faith to them, we should be able to turn to these four pillars—Creed, Sacraments, Morality, and Prayer—for guidance. When it comes to talking about our faith, these four pillars provide us with all of the H.E.L.P. that we need:

H = We Hold on to our faith that is revealed to us through Scripture and Tradition and is summarized in the Creed.

E = We Express our faith in the liturgy and sacraments of the Church.

L = We Live our faith according to Catholic morality.

P = We Pray our faith by maintaining a healthy prayer life.

With H.E.L.P., we should be able to do as St. Peter urged in his Letter: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15).

A Well-Built Faith

I had the opportunity to watch a home being built right next door to mine. Over weeks and months, I saw a beautiful new home rise from its foundation to take its place as the biggest home on our block. It was a sight to see. Later, when folks moved in, I had a chance to talk to my new neighbor and compliment him on his beautiful new home. Surprisingly, he launched into a litany of complaints about how poorly the home was built. While beautiful from the outside, it seems the home was not well built and was now creating a number of headaches for the new owner.

When it comes to our faith, it needs to be well built, not just attractive looking from the outside. This book, *A Well-Built Faith*, is designed to give you H.E.L.P. so that you have a firm foundation to speak about your faith. Ongoing faith formation is an action that says, in essence, “God is so great, so wonderful, and so loving, that with every fiber of my being, I want to know him more intimately.” God is actively present in our lives, shaping us into the person that reflects his divine image. Learning about our faith is not simply an intellectual exercise. It is a movement of the heart. St. Anselm taught that theology can be thought of as “faith seeking understanding.” We seek to understand the Lord God so that our faith may be strengthened and, like St. Richard of Chichester, we may be able to “see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly . . . day by day.” With a well-built faith, we can do this.

Ash Wednesday, 2008



Chapter One

Laying a Firm Foundation: Transmitting Faith

I love working with cement and concrete. I suppose that goes back to when I was a boy. One of my favorite things was to watch a cement truck at a construction site. What little boy is not amazed by the pouring of wet cement? At the same time, what little boy can resist immortalizing himself by etching his initials in wet cement? Not that I ever did that, of course. By the way, if you find the initials J.P. in the foundation of your home, it's probably my brother, John. Anyway, when it comes to our faith, it is important to have a firm foundation. Luckily, the Catholic faith is founded on four pillars.

“Christians are made, not born.”

—TERTULLIAN, CHURCH FATHER,
THIRD CENTURY AD

Making Christians

In the second century, one of the Church Fathers—Tertullian—wrote that “Christians are made, not born.” Tertullian was reminding us that it is the Church’s responsibility to make Christians and that this task involves certain tools used in a certain way. Tertullian, of course, was merely reminding us of what Jesus said right before his Ascension into heaven: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). Jesus is quite clear that making



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Laying a Firm Foundation: Transmitting Faith

disciples is our great commission and he gives us an indication of how we are to do this: by baptizing and by teaching.

Jesus himself identified what is needed for a firm foundation in the Christian life—faith, hope, love, forgiveness, compassion, mercy, justice, and so on—but he didn't stop there. He showed us, through his own life example, how this firm foundation is built and strengthened. This task of

Following Jesus requires not only information but transformation.

building faith and making disciples of Christ is known as *evangelization*. And it is the Church's most important task. Pope Paul VI said this

boldly in his encyclical *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, "The Church exists in order to evangelize." To evangelize is to call people to conversion—to call people from following misguided paths to following Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. To make a Christian is to impart a way of life. This means that becoming a follower of Jesus—a disciple—requires not only *information* but also *transformation*. We need to *know* certain things to be a disciple of Jesus, but we also need to *do* specific things to live as his followers.

Beginning with the End in Mind

When you build something, it's always good to begin with the end in mind.

When it comes to forming Catholics in faith, we, too, should begin with the end in mind.

So, just what is an adult Catholic supposed to "look like"? The answer very simply is: we are all to become saints.

Of course, few if any of us will ever be canonized as saints. However, the church has always had another understanding of the word *saints*. The early church referred to all of the faithful followers of Jesus as *the saints*. And how did the saints live? "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the

"The Church offers to all people the possibility of encountering the living God today and finding in him lasting meaning and hope."

(USCC FOR ADULTS, P. 499)

bread and to the prayers” (Acts of the Apostles 2:42). In other words, the saints—the first followers of Jesus—devoted themselves to the following:

- ⊕ **holding on to their faith** ⊕ **living faith**
- ⊕ **expressing faith** ⊕ **praying faith**

These are the four “pillars” of our Catholic way of life, then and now.

Laying a Firm Foundation — Understanding the Four Pillars of Our Faith

When someone makes an argument that has little or no substance to it, we say that the person “doesn’t have a leg to stand on.” As Catholics, we actually have *four* legs to stand on! The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that our faith is grounded in the firm foundation of the following four principles:

- 1. the Creed (holding on to faith)** **3. the moral life (living faith)**
- 2. the sacraments (expressing faith)** **4. prayer (praying faith)**

The Four Pillars of Every Relationship

Every loving relationship includes the following four principles:

1. You love that person because you *believe* certain things about him or her to be true: he or she is good, kind, forgiving, fun to be with, or any number of other qualities.
2. You *express* your love for that person in a variety of ways: cards, flowers, gifts, hugs, kisses, a gentle touch, a passionate embrace.
3. You *act* toward that person in a way that shows you love and respect him or her.
4. You *communicate* with that person in an ongoing manner, even if separated by distance.

In a similar way, each of us has been baptized into a deep, intimate, and loving relationship with God and with one another. This relationship is supported by

- what we believe about God (the Creed)
- how we express our love for God and how God expresses his love for us (the sacraments)
- how we act toward God and toward others (the moral life)
- how we communicate with God (prayer)

Nail down the facts, tear down the barriers!

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is over nine hundred pages long, so it comes as no surprise that many Catholics think of their faith as complex—and certainly too complex to share with others! *A Well-Built Faith*—cleverly developed around a construction theme—makes it easy and flat-out fun for any Catholic to know what they believe and to feel confident in *sharing* those beliefs with others.

The eighteen-chapter book—at times profound, at times humorous, always practical—follows the structure of the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Creed, Sacraments, Morality, and Prayer). Taking otherwise difficult topics about the Catholic faith and making them accessible and relevant to the lives of average Catholics, acclaimed author and teacher Joe Paprocki does so in a way that never compromises the rich depth of Catholic teaching and tradition.

From the Trinity to the seven sacraments, from the Ten Commandments to the Lord's Prayer, *A Well-Built Faith* will help Catholics nail down the facts of the faith and tear down the barriers keeping them from sharing their beliefs with others.



JOE PAPROCKI is a pastoral minister with over twenty-five years of experience in ministry. He has taught at the high school, college, and general adult levels, and is currently an eighth-grade catechist. Joe is the author of several books, including the best seller *The Catechist's Toolbox*. Joe blogs about his catechetical experiences at www.catechistsjourney.com

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