

CHAPTER IX

The Catechism

ARTICLE I

Time to Be Employed in Teaching Catechism and the Parts to Be Taught

The Catechism will be taught every day for a half hour from 4:00 until 4:30 in the afternoon.

From the first day of November until the last of January inclusive, the Catechism will be taught from 3:30 until 4:00 o'clock.

On the Wednesdays preceding holidays, it will be taught for one hour from 3:30 until 4:30 in the afternoon. In the winter, it will be taught from 3:00 until 4:00 o'clock. It will also be taught for one hour on the eve of the Feast of Saint Joseph, of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, and of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. When there is a holy day in the week, there will be only a half holiday in the afternoon, on Tuesday or Thursday. On that day in the morning, the lessons will be shortened, and the Catechism will be taught for a half hour at the end of school. On Wednesday afternoon in Holy Week the students will have neither reading nor writing. Only the Catechism will be taught, from 1:30 until 3:00 o'clock as is done on Sundays and holy days. The same will be done on the eves of the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity and of Christmas. At 3:00 o'clock the end of Catechism, the prayers will be said, and the students will be dismissed in the regular manner.

On Wednesdays before full holidays and on Sundays and ordinary holy days, Catechism will be taught in all the classes. The first half hour will be spent on a summary of the principal Mysteries. The rest of the time will be spent on the subject indicated for the week.

On solemn feasts for which there is a particular subject in the Catechism, the subject of the feast or of the Mystery will be taught, as it is indicated in the Catechism.

The Catechism will be taught on the afternoon of Wednesday in Holy Week as follows. From 1:30 until 2:00 o'clock, the teacher will explain the principal Mysteries. From 2:00 until 3:00, the teacher will explain the manner in which the ensuing days until Easter Sunday should be spent. On the eves of the Most Holy Trinity and of Christmas, the same will be done. On Mondays, the subject that will be treated throughout the week will be begun. On Sunday, the last day on which this subject is treated, a summary will be made of all that has been propounded during the five days of the week. In those classes in which only the abridgment of Christian Doctrine is taught, the teacher will also examine the students on all of the questions contained in the lessons for the preceding five days. On Sundays and holy days and on Wednesdays before a whole holiday, the Catechism lesson will be on the particular subject assigned for the week.

ARTICLE II

Manner of Asking Questions on the Catechism

Teachers will not speak to the students during Catechism as though they were preaching, but will ask the students questions and subquestions almost continuously. In order to make them understand what is being taught, a teacher will ask several students, one after another the same question. Sometimes the teacher will ask it of seven or eight, or even of 10 or 12, sometimes of even a greater number. The teacher will question the students in the order of the benches. If, however, the teacher notes that several in succession cannot answer a question or do not do it well, the teacher may call upon one or several out of the regular order and in different parts of the class. Then, after having given the signal once, the teacher will make a sign to another to answer. After one or several have answered, the one upon whom the teacher had called before in the regular order will be called on.

The teacher will question all of the students each day, several times, if possible. However, the teacher will interrupt the regular order and the sequence from time to time to question those observed to be inattentive or, worse ignorant. A special effort will be made to question, much more often than the others, those whose minds are slow and dull and who have difficulty in remembering. This is particularly necessary with the Abridgment of Christian Doctrine, especially more so on those questions in it which every Christian must know.

On the days of the week upon which the Catechism lesson is given for half an hour on the summary of the principal Mysteries, that is, on Wednesdays or on Sundays and holy days, teachers will not question students on the summary in succession in the order in which they are seated on the benches, as done for the lessons on the subject assigned for the week. Neither will they ask the questions in succession in the order in which they are in the Catechism. A teacher may sometimes one question one or more students in different places around the room. Similarly, a teacher might ask sometimes one or more questions on the Mysteries, sometimes one or more questions on the Sacrament of Penance, sometimes one or more questions on the Holy Eucharist or some other subject. These questions will be asked in the above manner and without regular order. The teacher will continue to ask questions on the summary in this manner throughout the first half hour. In the questions, the teacher will make use of only the simplest expressions and words which are very easily understood and need no explanation, if this is possible making the questions as short as possible.

No answers are to be given word by word in a single word or two. It will be required that complete answers are to be given in complete sentences. If a little child or some ignorant one is unable to give an entire answer, the teacher will divide the question in such a way that the child may give in three answers what could not be given in one.

If it even happens that a student slow in mind cannot repeat properly an answer that several others have already given one after another, the teacher will, in order to help the student to remember the answer have it repeated four or five times alternately by a student who knows it well and by the one who does not know it. This is done to make it much easier for the slower student to learn.

ARTICLE III

Duties of the Teacher During Catechism

One of the principal tasks of the teacher during Catechism is to conduct the lessons in such a manner that all the students will be very attentive and may easily retain all that is said to them. To effect this, teachers will always keep all of the students in sight and will observe everything they do. Teachers will be careful to talk very little and to ask a great many questions.

Teachers will speak only on the subject assigned for the day and will guard against departing from it. Teachers will always speak in a serious manner, which will inspire the students with respect and restraint. They will never say anything vulgar or anything that might cause laughter, and will be careful not to speak in a dull way which could produce weariness. In every lesson teachers will be sure to indicate some practices to the students, and to instruct them as thoroughly as is possible concerning those things which pertain to morals and to the conduct which should be observed in order to live as a true Christian. They will reduce these practices and these matters of morals to questions and answers. This will make the students very much more attentive and make them retain the answers more easily. Care must be taken not to disturb the Catechism lesson by untimely reprimands and corrections. If it happens that some students deserve punishment, it should ordinarily be postponed until the next day, without letting them notice it. The punishment will then be given just before Catechism. The teacher may, however, sometimes, but rarely and when considered unavoidable give a few strokes of the ferule during this time.

On Sundays and holy days, when the Catechism lasts three times as long as on the other days, teachers will always choose some story that the students will enjoy, and will tell it in a way that will please them and renew their attention, with details that will prevent the students from being bored. Teachers will say nothing during the Catechism lessons that they have read in some well-approved book and of which they are not very certain.

Teachers will never decide whether a sin is venial or mortal. They may only say, when they judge this to be the case "That will offend God very much." "It is a sin very much to be feared." "It is a sin that has evil consequences." "It is a grievous sin." Although sins should not be considered more grievous than they are, it is, however, more dangerous to make them appear slight and trifling. A great horror of sins, however slight they may appear, must always be inspired. An offense against God cannot be slight, and nothing that concerns God can be trifling.

Teachers will plan that the questions, the subquestions, and the answers to the subquestions fulfill the following four conditions: 1) they must be short; 2) they must make complete sense; 3) they must be accurate; and 4) the answers must be suited to the capacity of the average and not of the most able and most intelligent students, so that the majority may be able to answer the questions that are asked of them.

Teachers must be so careful in the instruction of all their students that they will not leave a single one in ignorance, at least of those things which a Christian is obliged to know in reference both to doctrine and to practice. In order not to neglect a matter of such great importance, teachers should often consider seriously that they will render an account to God and that they will be guilty in God's sight for the ignorance of the children who have been under their care. They will be held accountable for the sins into which this ignorance has led the students, if they have been in charge of them but have not applied themselves with sufficient care to deliver the students of their ignorance. Teachers should often consider that there will be nothing on which God will examine them and by which God will judge them more severely than on this point.

Teachers will help students to apply themselves perfectly to the Catechism. This is not naturally easy for them and ordinarily does not last long. For this purpose, teachers will employ the following means: 1) they will take care not to rebuff or to confuse students, either by words or in any other manner, when they are unable to answer properly the question which has been asked them; 2) they will encourage and even help them to say what they have difficulty in recalling; and 3) they will offer rewards, which they will give from time to time to those who have been the best behaved and the most attentive, or sometimes even to the more ignorant who have made the greatest effort to learn well. They will employ various other similar means, which prudence and charity will enable them to find, to encourage students to learn the Catechism more readily and to retain it more easily.

ARTICLE IV

Duties of Students During Catechism

During the time when the Catechism is being taught, students will be seated, their bodies erect, their faces and eyes turned toward the teacher, their arms crossed, and their feet on the floor. The teacher will indicate with his signal the first who is to be questioned. Before answering, those questioned will rise, take off their hat, make the sign of the cross, removing their gloves if they are wearing them, and cross their arms. Students will answer the question in such a way that, by including the question, the answer will make complete sense.

When the first student has almost finished answering, the one who comes next will rise, make the sign of the cross, saying the words in a tone low enough not to interrupt the one who is reciting and, making sure of having completed the sign of the cross by the time the other one has finished, repeat the same answer, unless the teacher should ask another question. All of the others who follow on the same bench or on the next bench will do the same.

If the teacher should happen to call upon one or several students in succession out of the regular order, the one whose turn it was to answer will remain standing during all of this until notified to speak, or until one of those called out of turn gives the correct explanation. When that student finishes, the one whose regular turn it was will resume answering. When answering during Catechism students will keep their eyes modestly lowered, will not stare fixedly at the teacher, and will not turn their heads slightly from side to side. They will keep their bodies erect and both feet properly placed on the floor. They will speak in a moderate tone, rather low than loud, so that they will not be heard by the other classes and the other students will be more attentive. They will, above all, speak very slowly and distinctly, so that not only the words but also all of the syllables may be heard. Teachers will see that a student pronounces all the syllables particularly the last ones.

All students will be very attentive during the entire Catechism lesson. Teachers will not allow them to cross their legs nor put their hands under their garments, so that they do not do the least thing contrary to purity. A teacher will not permit any student to laugh when another has not answered properly, nor any one of them to prompt another who is unable to answer. The teacher will see to it that the students leave the room as infrequently as possible during Catechism, and then only in case of great necessity.

ARTICLE V

Particular Details Concerning Catechism for Sundays and Holy Days

On all Sundays and holy days, there will be Catechism for an hour and a half. The exceptions are Easter Sunday, Pentecost Sunday, Trinity Sunday, and Christmas Day. On these days, there will not be any Catechism. The students will assemble during the half hour preceding the time for Catechism. While they are assembling, they will question one another in pairs on the Diocesan Catechism, it is done during breakfast and lunch. The teacher will indicate those who are to question one another and repeat the Catechism at this time.

In places where vespers are sung at 3:00 in the afternoon, the Catechism will be taught from 1:00 until 2:30 and the students will assemble between 12:30 and 1:00. At 2:30, they will say the prayers which are ordinarily said every day in the afternoon at the end of school. After that, if there remains sufficient time, some verses of a canticle will be sung as usual. The students will then be taken to vespers.

In places where vespers are sung at 2:30 the Catechism will begin at 12:30 and will be finished by 2:00. At 2:00, the prayers will be said and the students will be taken to the church as indicated above.

In places where vespers are sung at 2:00, the Catechism at 12:30 will be on the summary. From 1:00 to 2:00, the Catechism will be on one special subject. The prayers will not be said. At 2:00, the students will be taken to the church for vespers. After vespers, they will be sent home.

During the first half hour, the Catechism will be on the Abridgment. Teachers will do nothing but ask questions, without giving any explanations. Teachers will not speak on one subject only, but will ask various questions on the Abridgment without following any regular order. During the next hour, the Catechism will be on the entire subject which has been taken in parts on each of the days of the preceding week or on the subject of the feast. During this time, teachers will question all of the students several times. At the end, they will make some practical applications, which should be the fruits that the students ought to obtain from the subject which has been expounded to them. Students who do not regularly attend the school may be admitted to the Catechism provided they cause no disorder.