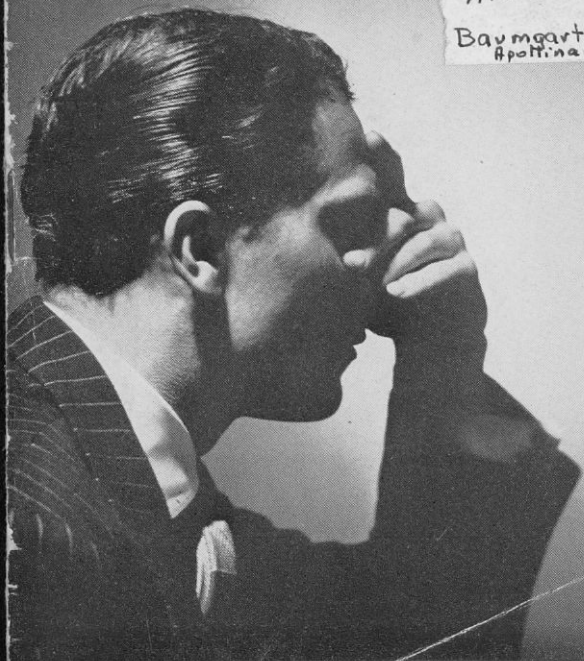


What It Means
TO BE A CATHOLIC

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To Be a Catholic



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MOST REV. APOLLINARIS BAUMGARTNER

O.F.M. CAP., D.D.

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Today the Christian Faith is in danger of being undermined or weakened by the spirit that is abroad in the world—the spirit of materialism and indifference to things divine. We point to the danger and call upon all our people to “stand fast in the Faith (I Corinthians, 16, 13); “stand fast, and be not held again under the yoke of bondage.” (Galatians, 5, 5.1). In the words of the Apostle Paul, we cry out to you, Beloved Americans: “Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Therefore, take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and to stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with the truth and having on the breastplate of justice; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. In all things, taking the shield of

Faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God.)" (Ephesians 6, 11-17). We call upon you to offer not the negative resistance of a war of words but the positive resistance of an intensified Christian life through the observance of the Holy Gospels, and of those age-old Catholic customs and traditions which are so well in accord with the American way of life and so capable of being assimilated into the American picture, without being absorbed and destroyed. We call upon you to stand fast; and let your rallying cry be, "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism!" (Ephesians 4, 5).

To accomplish this end we should LEARN our Faith; LOVE our Faith and LIVE our Faith and thereby find ourselves good Americans as well as good Catholics.

I

To be a Catholic means that we believe in a God—the one true God in whom there are three Persons—The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. As says Tobias, "We are the children of Saints, and look for that life which God will give to those who never change their faith from Him." (Tobias 2, 18).

To be a Catholic means that we believe that the Son of God became man for our salvation and established one true Church—the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.

To be a Catholic means that we believe that Christ constituted St. Peter and his successors as His Vicars on earth when He said, "Thou art

Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of hell shall not prevail. And to thee I will give the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matthew, 16, 18 & 19). We accept Peter's successor, the Pope of Rome, the visible head of the Church, as the Vicar of the invisible Head, our Lord Jesus Christ. And we acknowledge his right to lead us in matters of religion. For, though he is but a human being, his office has been exalted by the Son of God, from Whom we have the promise, "Behold I am with you always, even to the end of the world." (Matthew, 28, 20).

To be a Catholic means that we are believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ—that its Glad Tidings form the basis of our way of life and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 2-12) is to us Christ's platform and its Beatitudes are the planks thereof—the principles upon which we stand and for which we are ready to fight and to die, if necessary.

To be a Catholic means that we take literally the words of Jesus in giving us the Sacraments, especially His own Body and Blood in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

To be a Catholic means that we accept Jesus as our Redeemer and, as He laid down His life for us we are ready to lay down ours for Him; as He loved us, we love Him; as He made sacrifices for us, we are ready to make sacrifices for Him.

To be a Catholic means that we accept the commission of Jesus, "Behold thy mother, (John

19, 27) which were His last words to man before His death upon the Cross the remaining words being addressed to His Father. And together with St. John who stood there, we accept Mary as our own. In honoring her, we honor the creature to whom God gave some of the greatest privileges and graces, the one whom God's angel saluted as "Full of grace" (Luke 1, 28), the one who after Jesus, our Mediator, is our mediatrix with God.

To be a Catholic means that we profess the same Faith which was taught by the Apostles Peter and Paul; the same Faith for which the Apostles and martyrs shed their blood; the same Faith which the Saints professed throughout the centuries down to our own day; the same Faith which is shared by 330,000,000 other Catholics throughout the world, more than 24,000,000 of whom are our fellow-Americans.

To be a Catholic means that we are ready to keep the vows we made at Baptism — that is to renounce Satan and his works and to believe in Jesus Christ and His Church.

To be a Catholic means that we offer civil authorities the respect which is their due, for as says the Apostle Paul "Let everyone be subject to higher powers. For there is no power but from God." (Romans 13, 1). We should observe the laws of the land; take our rightful place in the sun of government when this is given to us; exercise the right of suffrage according to the liberty which we have in such matters, and in so doing consider not our religious or fraternal or social affiliations but consult our conscience, which will lead us to cast our vote for him whom we believe will most justly fulfill the duties of office for the common good without prejudice and without discrimination.

To be a Catholic means that we are ready to perform the spiritual and corporal works of mercy for the love of God and our fellowman regardless of race or creed. It means that we shall take part in all activities seeking the amelioration of poverty, distress, sickness and tribulation in so far as these are civic activities and do not involve us in religious association with others.

To be a Catholic means that we shall always keep clearly in mind that the end and the means to an end are not the same thing; we shall keep our sense of values from being distorted and we shall be careful not to mistake the shadow for the substance.

To be a Catholic means that we shall ever be unswerving in our loyalty to God and country, abstaining from membership in associations which are inimical to either, and refraining from membership in organizations forbidden by the Church, such as secret societies for joining which a Catholic automatically incurs excommunication (Canon 2335) which deprives him of the right to share in the prayers of the Faithful, of the right to receive the Sacraments in life and to Christian burial after death. And Catholics are forbidden to marry those who join such societies.

To be a Catholic means, above all, to have Faith in God and to remember the Apostle's words, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a Gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be an anathema." (Galatians 1, 8). Hence we should seek to learn more and more about our ancient Faith and grow to love it.

II

If we love our Faith we accept cheerfully not

only its privileges but its prohibitions, not only its prerogatives but its sacrifices, not only its favors but its commands.

If we love our Faith we shall strive in word and in work to make its principles the guiding principles of our life.

If we love our Faith we shall attend to the fulfillment of its practices with willingness and desire and we shall never stoop to ridicule it in order to appear "broad-minded" or "liberal" in the eyes of others.

If we love our Faith we shall be careful never to expose it to ridicule or misunderstanding on the part of those who are ignorant of its teachings and imagine that we believe many things which we do not.

If we love our Faith we shall be ready to explain it to all who are interested or desire to have a knowledge thereof—remembering always that failure to know everything about the Faith is not in itself a sign of lack of Faith. And even a complete knowledge of the teachings of the Church is not in itself Faith—for Faith is a gift of God and does not flow from mere knowledge, for "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not." (Hebrews 11, 1).

If we love our Faith we shall desire to see it loved and respected by others, even by those who through ignorance or error choose to walk another way of life. We expect them not to ridicule us; we shall not ridicule them. If they are following their conscience, however misinformed, we shall not undertake arguments with them, unless we are first attacked—but, being attacked, we shall not hesitate to defend our faith by seeking

to enlighten those who attack us. And, if they remain unconvinced, we shall be satisfied to defend our belief and to expose their errors without becoming vituperative or personal.

If we love our Faith we shall be mindful of the love, which the Son of God had for us; mindful that He sacrificed Himself to bring it to us.

If we love our Faith nothing and nobody can take it from us.

If we love our Faith we shall ever be ready to live according to it and ever be ready to make any sacrifice rather than deny it; ready to give up any material gain, even life itself, rather than to lose it, mindful of the words of the eldest Machabees, "We are ready to die rather than to transgress the laws of God received from our fathers;" (2 Machabees 7, 2) and of the words of Our Lord, "He that shall lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matthew 16, 25).

If we love our Faith we shall live it.

III

To live as a Catholic we must keep the Ten Commandments of God whose Divine Son says, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matthew 19, 17).

To live as a Catholic we must keep the Law of Love. "A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 13, 34). And, "These things I command you, that you love one another." (John 15, 17). To love means to desire and strive to attain the good of another — it means to refrain from all that hurts and harms us needlessly — it means to keep from any deliberate action, thought or word that would

be a breach of charity, it means "bear ye one another's burdens."

To live as a Catholic we must keep the Commandments of the Church whose Founder says, "Who heareth you heareth me, and who despiseth you despiseth me." (Luke 10, 16).

To live as a Catholic we must frequently raise our hearts to God in prayer—in the morning, at night, before meals, in times of temptation, sickness and trial. Our thoughts should frequently be on Divine things and our words should frequently ascend to God for the things we need and in order to adore Him, to thank Him and to make reparation to Him for our sins and the sins of the world.

To live as a Catholic means that we shall ever be mindful that we are the "children of God" through Baptism, and the "soldiers of Jesus Christ" through Confirmation. And, should we be parents, we shall see to it that our children in turn are baptized as soon as possible after birth, having made arrangements with the Priest as to time and place beforehand. And, should a child of ours be in danger of death and no Priest be available, we shall most certainly see to it that someone—anyone who knows how to do so—will baptize that child: We shall frequently recall our baptismal vows and ask God to make us faithful to them.

To live as a Catholic means that as soon as our children reach the age of discretion (about seven years of age) we shall send them to the parish church for instruction so that they may be prepared to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, mindful that He has asked us frequently to eat thereof, "For my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed." (John 6, 56). And "Unless you eat

the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you shall not have life in you." (John 6, 54). And again "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day." (John 6, 55). Nothing differentiates us more from others, who are called Christians, than our absolute belief in the truth—the literal truth—of the words of the Son of God in respect to this Sacrament.

To live as a Catholic means that we shall consider it a privilege to be present at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, at which Jesus Christ, on His own testimony, becomes present for us upon the altar through the ministration of a mere man to whom He has given so tremendous a power, and wherein is fulfilled literally His command, "Do this for a commemoration of me." (Luke 22, 19).

To live as a Catholic means that we shall prepare our souls for Holy Communion by the worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance wherein we confess our sins to the representative of Jesus Christ and receive absolution from Him through His priest—for such was His wish when he conferred the power upon His Apostles on the night of His Resurrection day, "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained." (John 20, 23). It is not necessary to receive this Sacrament every time we communicate. Those who receive daily need confess only once or twice a month, provided they keep from serious sin. Those who receive Holy Communion each Sunday need not confess each time, if they remain free from serious sin. But all spiritual writers recommend that all confess their sins about once a month, even if their sins be not great or numerous. This is the Sacrament in which God has prepared for us the machinery of mercy

which gives much better assurance of our having been forgiven than when we rely merely upon our own direct confession to Him. He willed it this way — and He surely knows how He wants us to seek forgiveness.

To live as a Catholic means that as soon as possible after children have reached the proper age to understand what it is they receive in the Sacrament, they should be confirmed in order that they may receive the Holy Ghost to make them strong Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ — equipped with the graces to face an inimical, materialistic world.

To live as a Catholic means that when sickness strikes us down we shall send for the Priest as says St. James "Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5, 14-15). If anyone who is near and dear to us fall sick and cannot himself ask for the Priest, we ought in charity call for a priest. Extreme Unction should be received, if possible, while a person is conscious — it is the Sacrament of the sick — we should not wait until one is unconscious and in the throes of death — although even then, if it has not been attended to beforehand, we should not hesitate night or day to call for the Priest.

To live as a Catholic means that we shall reverence the priesthood, remembering that those who share the Priesthood of Jesus Christ through the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders are human beings in need of our prayers so that they may work worthily for the good of our souls. We should encourage vocations to the priesthood among our sons and friends.

To live as a Catholic means that we shall receive the Sacrament of Matrimony in the manner and according to the laws of Holy Mother Church, that is, in the presence of the priest and two witnesses, all other prescriptions being fulfilled. But, since Matrimony is not only a Sacrament but likewise a civil contract, all priests must require that those who wish to receive this Sacrament will present a license from the Government permitting them to enter the civil contract. Be it noted, that the license of the government is not a license to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony, for the State claims no authority over the Sacraments of the Church and the Church claims no authority over the civil contracts of the State — but they work in harmony for the protection of those who enter this state of life. The Church legislates for the Sacrament — she forbids the marriage of Catholics to non-Catholics, she forbids the marriage of close relatives or of persons who have been divorced and persons who, for one reason or another, are not considered free to receive the Sacrament, even though the State may declare them free to enter the civil contract. She does not recognize divorce, no matter by whom it is granted, as being the proper dissolution of the sacramental marriage bond which continues “until death do us part,” although she does not deny the civil effects of a marriage dissolved in civil law by competent authority. She relies on the word of Her Founder, “What therefore God hath joined, let no man put asunder.” (Mark 10, 9). Even when divorce has been granted by the civil courts the Church believes that the marriage, in as far as the sacramental bond is concerned, still remains intact, and no one can remain a Catholic who would act as though the sacramental bond had been dissolved. Hence St. Paul says of the divorcee,

“Whilst her husband liveth she shall be called an adulteress if she be with another man.” (Romans 7, 3). The prime purpose of marriage is the procreation and education of offspring with mutual companionship as an accompanying purpose. St. Francis de Sales puts it this way, “The purpose of parenthood is to people this world with adorers of God and to fill heaven with saints.” Those are to be condemned as guilty of serious offense, who fail to prepare for marriage by a virtuous life; and act before or outside of marriage as though they were already husband and wife. And any human effort before or in marriage to interfere with the prime purpose of marriage is illicit and grievously sinful.

To live as a Catholic means that we must see to the religious education of our children. Where there is a Catholic school, children must attend it. Where there is no Catholic school, children are to get supplementary religious education in Sunday School—and parents are bound in conscience to see to it that their children attend such instructions. Moreover, parents are under obligation to see to the religious education of their children even at home, setting them the example of prayer and virtue; and instructing them as far as they can. Children coming to the instructions ought to have learned at their mother’s knee at least: The Sign of the Cross, the Our Father and the Hail Mary. The Church lays the heavy penalty of excommunication upon parents who send their children to professedly non-Catholic schools, so that whenever there arises the question of sending a child to any school it is the duty of parents to inquire whether such school is Catholic or at least non-sectarian in the sense that Catholic children are free to practice their Catholic Faith. If the school is professedly sectarian Catholic children may not attend it.

To live as a Catholic means to carry a cross — but that was the intention of Him who bore His own Cross to Calvary and said “Whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14, 27). And “if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Matthew 16, 24).

To live as a Catholic means to live as Jesus Christ intended us to live; to live as He desired us to live; to prepare for heaven and its glory according to norms He laid down.

FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

“Dearly beloved, I was under necessity to write to you; to beseech you to contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the saints. For certain men are secretly entered in, ungodly men, turning the grace of Our Lord God into riotousness and denying the only sovereign Ruler and Our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . But you, my dearly beloved, be mindful of the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of Our Lord Jesus Christ: Who told you that in the last time there should come mockers, walking according to their own desires in ungodliness. These are they who separate themselves, sensual men, having not the Spirit. But you, my beloved, building yourself upon your most holy Faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ, unto life everlasting.” (Jude 3 & 4, 17-21).

“You brethren knowing these things before, take heed, lest being led aside by the error of the unwise, you fall from your own steadfastness.” (2 Peter 3, 17).

Don't

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