

# St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

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## TEACHING THE BASICS OF OUR FAITH *by S. Casarotto, CS* 10/5/08

Recently, I came across a booklet printed in Buffalo in 1916 and published by Fr. John P. Boland, the famous "Labor Priest", who was then an assistant at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in the Hooks of the city. The booklet is a little compendium of catechism and prayers in Italian and, as we read on the front cover, it was printed "Per l'operaio" or for the Italian immigrant worker. One is surprised at the contents, especially when one considers the high rate of illiteracy at that time. Still, as Blessed Scalabrini often pointed out, it fulfilled the fundamental need of the immigrant to be instructed and protected in his Catholic faith. It is obvious that my copy had been better days. A comparison with books used in today's catechetical programs would also be an eye-opener.

Today, children are not taught all seven sacraments or that Jesus Christ is true God and true man. He is often presented as "Mr. Nice Guy" who befriends everybody and throws a free party every Sunday. Hardly anything is said about the nature and reality of sin, sanctifying grace and the nature and mission of the Church and the necessary means of salvation. Almost everything our parents and grandparents were taught at the same age level by the "infamous" Baltimore Catechism is now deemed "too complicated," "too technical," and, of course, "too traditional." Memorization is seen as draconian since experiential formation is seen as superior to catechetical instruction. I once visited a large Catholic school and I found that 4th and 5th graders could not recite individually the Our Father. When I reported it to the Principal, there was an up roar from the teachers who each blamed the lower grade teacher, the parents and, of course, the priest who should not have interfered in the academic field, even though the manual I received specified that by the end of the 2nd grade students had been taught the basic Catholic prayers. Eventually, one teacher wryly quipped: "To teach does not mean to learn!"

Dogmas such as original sin, the Real Presence, sacramental grace, the Immaculate Conception and papal infallibility are often absent from basic Catholic teachings. Ironically, those same young students are expected to memorize elements from the Periodic Table, states and their capitals, names of rivers and mountains. Learning the 10 Commandments, on the other hand, is seen as being "pre-Vatican II." And, of course, children are now taught from the lowest grades all the minutiae of human biology, only to arrive at marriage with less understanding of human sexuality than their grandmothers. Not long ago, I received a phone call from a feisty 84-year old Italian-American lady, a former nurse, in the suburbs. She was appalled at the ignorance of the real facts of life and of moral behavior of young people and she wanted do to something about it. I can not write in this column what is happening in some schools which is either condoned by parents or covered up by the administration. No wonder that many parents are choosing to home school their children, notwithstanding heroic sacrifices.

As for doctrinal instruction, now the contents of the old catechism have changed to butterflies, clouds and balloons. For the Mass, young people are often taught insipid generic songs. Likewise, it is no wonder that today many Catholics say they pray but do not know any prayer. Ask students of our Catholic schools when they last had a

Eucharistic Benediction. They might need a dictionary. A few years ago, I gathered the 7th and 8th graders of a Catholic school in church. They enjoyed my biblical readings, a little pep talk, some prayers and Eucharistic Benediction with the monstrance. None of them had received it before.