

FIRST YEAR IN REVIEW

Jerry Johnson

Well here it is already, the first anniversary issue of *Formation Monthly*! We hope that those of you who have taken the time to read the *Monthly* have benefited and gained a better understanding of your faith. In this issue we will review the topics we have covered over the last year and hit a few of the high points.

In January 07' we began by talking about our conversion to Jesus Christ and what a difference this conversion can make in our lives and faith. As the bishops have stated: "This is crucial: we must be converted and we must continue to be converted!" So how is your conversion coming along? Is it growing and deepening over time as you continue to seek God in your life? Do you recognize the desire for God that he has placed in your heart? The desire to know Christ more personally and to know more about him. This is where we really begin our lifelong journey of faith.

In February we explained that the very purpose of our existence is to share in God's own life. He offers us this life in his Word and the sacraments and grants us the grace to respond to his call "to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature" (CCC 1996) The response he asks of us is that "obedience of faith" which is a complete submission of our lives to him.

"Seek first the kingdom of God"

The March issue examined the role of repentance and the Sacrament of Reconciliation in our lives. Jesus' very first message to the people in the Gospel of Mark was: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and

believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Paragraph 1431 of the catechism tells us that "Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace." We also explained the importance of forming and examining our conscience according to God's Word and the teaching of his Church so that we are aware of the sin in our lives.

In April we explored the full, active and fruitful participation in the Mass that we are all called to. As Pope Benedict has instructed, the active participation called for is actually a greater awareness of the mystery being celebrated in the Eucharistic celebration and its relationship to our daily lives. We are called again and again to offer our lives to the Father as we seek that intimate union with Christ, which is the fruit of receiving the Eucharist. As

paragraph 1407 of the catechism states "The Eucharist is the heart and summit of the Church's life". This should be the experience of our personal life as well as we enter into the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass!

In June we continued to look at the Mass and answered some common questions about the particular actions that take place during the celebration. We explained how the ritual and repetition that we experience help us to more fully enter into and participate in the Mass. Even the gestures and actions of our bodies are an expression of reverence and adoration at particular times during the celebration. We use all of our senses and body language to accomplish that full, active and fruitful participation that we are called to. We also examined the cycle of Sacred Scripture that the Church uses and how this carries us through the entire Bible over the course of three years.

July brought us an exploration of the covenants which God has entered into with his people over the course of time. Beginning with Adam and continuing on through covenants with Noah, Abram, Moses, and David to the new and final covenant in Jesus, which fulfills and completes all of the previous covenants. We showed how a covenant goes beyond a simple promise. It is a complete exchange of lives which is made binding by an oath, a sacred form of

commitment which invokes God's holy name for assistance and blessing. An understanding of covenant leads us to a deeper appreciation of Jesus' role as mediator and our responsibilities as we enter into this sacred commitment of faith at our Baptism. This also sheds light on why we consider marriage a sacred covenant with the traits of fidelity, permanence and a total exchange of lives.

The topic for August was the "Deposit of Faith". This deposit is comprised of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition as it is guarded and handed on to us by the Magisterium, the Pope united with the Bishops. Much of Sacred Tradition, or the official teaching of Church, is expressed in the New Catechism of the Catholic Church. We trust that this Sacred Deposit is kept free from error by God and is the reason why the fullness of the truth is found in the Catholic Church. This is a source of unity for us as Catholics, but is also the reason for the separation of those Protestants and others who believe that Sacred Scripture is the sole authority.

In September we took a deeper look at Sacred Scripture and its importance in the life of the Church. As we learn from the Catechism, the Church "forcefully and specifically exhorts all of the Christian faithful...to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ' by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures." To be fruitful, our reading of Scripture must be accompanied by prayer and read within the living tradition of the Church. This means that we always look to the authority of the Church as it "...exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God." (CCC 119)

In October we continued our look at Sacred Scripture and explored the different "senses" of Scripture. As the Catechism describes, the literal sense of Scripture is the actual meaning conveyed by the words and the other senses are based on and flow from this sense. The spiritual sense is divided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. The allegorical sense describes how a particular passage is related to Christ and his Church. This sense shows how the New Testament was hidden within the words and prophecies of the Old Testament. The moral sense is simply the moral teaching given to us in Scripture and the anagogical sense is how Scripture relates to death, judgment, heaven and hell. These

senses help us to understand the riches and depth of God's Word.

November brought us to "Works, Motives and the Obedience of Faith". In this article we examined the relationship between faith and works and how our motives can determine the goodness or sinfulness of our actions. As the letter of St. James explains, our works are the completion of our faith and our salvation by grace relies on both faith and works. In examining the term "obedience of faith", which St. Paul gives us in his letter to the Romans, we see faith as an important motive for our obedience. The Catechism describes this obedience that flows from our faith as a complete submission of our lives to God. But even beyond faith, Paul's letter to the Corinthians describes an even greater motive. That of love.

In December we completed the year with a discussion of that love which is the greatest motive for everything we do in our lives. As St. John tells us, "God is love", the agape' love of total giving and sacrifice. The love which Jesus showed us with his ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We are to take up this same cross of love in our lives in order to show who we are as his disciples, as a Christian people. This love is expressed in many and varied ways in our lives. It certainly shows itself as compassion and a caring for all those in need of our help, but it is also shown in our desire to share the fullness of the truth with others and by a discipline which can lead us to an awareness of that truth. As Jesus tells us in the gospel of John "If you remain in my word, [*obedient to my teaching*] you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31) As we continue in the months ahead with a deeper look at our faith and its expression in our lives, may we always seek that truth, which in its essence is Jesus himself. Let us follow where he leads us through his Word and the teaching of his Church that keep us on the narrow path to eternal life. That life in which we experience the fullness of communion with him, which is our ultimate goal and destiny!

If you missed any of the months we have summarized above or want to take another look at a particular issue, we have compiled the complete year of the *Formation Monthly* and it is available at the Faith Formation table in the family room.

Jerry is a charter member of St. Lambert's and catechist for more than 20 years. He chairs the St. Lambert Faith Formation Committee and is currently in the Master Catechist Training program of the diocese.