



Has our Church let me down?



This month our BC Catholic published a three-page article by an American priest-religious of the Reformed Carmelites. He is well qualified to answer the question and we are grateful to him and the BC Catholic for bringing us this necessary information.

Many of us, indeed all Catholics, need this knowledge, now, and in each generation. He points out what many forget – that the Church is not just the Pope, or bishops or priests or religious, but us, all of us, joined together by Baptism, our initiation into a new life in Christ. As I look back over 85 years, 60 as a priest, history, local and worldwide, gives to all who take the time and make the effort to grow in the knowledge of our Church, a vision of a great Lady, a wonderful Mother – Holy Mother Church.

We are all members of the Church – the image of family is very fitting and understandable. In God's plan of life and salvation, the family, based on a happy marriage, permanent, faithful and open to new life, is the basic cell of society – so important it is seen as a sacrament.

If a child in a Catholic family does not feel proud of being a member of this mystical body, he has already been let down by his Catholic parents. In God's plan of salvation, the family is our first school and our first church – a place of worship, a place of learning. Our parents, and all parents, as they procreate, with God, a living child, accept the responsibility of caring for that child, feeding, clothing, washing and training in how to live, sharing with their offspring all they learned by teaching and experience, all their wisdom, their lifestyle.

People of faith want to share the highest, the ultimate truth of how we live. Prayer and worship take their proper place along with eating and sleeping, washing and developing this precious gift of human life. "Man does not live on bread alone", "We are more than skin and bones", "We did not make ourselves", "We are made in the image of God". We can learn and cherish our relationship to God and each other.

As we grow in knowledge of ourselves, our family, our neighbours, our church, local and worldwide, we also develop a joyful appreciation of our membership, our benefits, our responsibilities. We who are in positions of leadership in matter of faith and behavior are influential as trained and authorized members, responsible to parents, Church and Almighty God for

advice and example given. If faithful and good, to their honor – if unfaithful and bad, to their shame and scandal, we have let these children down. Being a Catholic is not a burden; rather it is a gift.

Knowledge is the key. If parents do not know and appreciate our faith, they will not pass it on. If children do not receive a warm, loving atmosphere of faith in their home, teaching about God – reading picture Bibles – learning to make the Sign of the Cross – learning how to pray and to attend church every Sunday – they have been let down by members of the Church, their parents. Every Christian baptized in infancy should know and befriend their baptismal sponsors, their godfather and godmother. They in turn should keep in touch throughout life as their duty is carried out. Again, the key is knowledge. If parents, in picking persons to be sponsors, do not appreciate the importance of their faith – a living faith – the child is being let down.

All through the Church, parents, teachers, sisters, brothers, priests, bishops, the Pope, each of us is capable of failing in our duties, behaviour or teaching, and letting down others, in the church and prospective converts, who observes us. Bad example by any one of us hurts the whole Church. Gossip, by word or media, spreads the damage to Christ's Mystical Body. Do *we* see *our* faults that damage our Holy Mother – our Church? I remember a Retreat for clergy, religious, teachers and parents put on at Notre Dame High School in the early 70's directed by Jean Vanier. The gymnasium was packed. Archbishop Carney's sister, Sr. Josephine, S.A. was on the organizing committee. The daily celebration of the Eucharist was guided by Father N. Boomars and featured generous participation of parents, particularly in the penitential rite. Three couples were recruited to speak up on our behalf: "For the time we failed to teach our children our Faith – Lord, have mercy"; "For the times we gave bad example – Christ, have mercy"; "For the time we have failed to correct our children – Lord, have mercy". In the spirit of the moment, Archbishop Carney added "For giving the committee a hard time – Lord, have mercy."

We are a church of sinners, not condoning any sin, ours or others, but, believing in our Savior and hoping in his gracious mercy, we can use his Sacrament of Penance and Holy Communion to recover our joyful membership in our family of faith – in Holy Mother Church.