# Five Catholic books every home should have

As a confessed book nerd and obsessed reader, I have *a lot* of books. Shelves and bookcases and rooms of books. I've made myself share them and I try to limit how many I purchase or solicit for review.

Narrowing the books I love and the books I recommend for every Catholic home to five – and not just five categories, but five actual books! – was nearly impossible. I crowdsourced with colleagues, Googled ten tabs' worth of findings, and lost a clump of hair trying to decide.

## The Bible

Make sure it's a Catholic version of the Bible with all the "extra" books.

Don't be ignorant of Scripture. And help the kids in your life not to be ignorant either.

One way you can do that is to make sure you're familiar with it. Don't be afraid to read right out of the actual Bible. Make notes in the margins. Highlight sections. Journal around it. Dog-ear the pages. (Or buy a Bible – like the *Catholic Journaling Bible* or the *Catholic Notetaking Bible* – that's designed for those activities.)

I have a lesson that I do when I'm teaching fifth graders that involves half the class using the missalette and half the class using the Bible. It's a visual way of showing them that what's in the missalette – what we use at Mass – is the same as what's in the actual Bible.

One of my goals when I teach weekly religious education classes with third grade and older is to have them open their Bibles at least once during the hour we're together. It's not

an easy goal and I don't always accomplish it.

All the same, this is the most important book we have at our disposal.

(And yes, I know it's actually a library of books. That's the beauty – and the challenge – of scripture!)

## *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

You can find the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* online for free and in searchable formats, but there's something to be said for the good ole brick version. I like to read things out of the actual *Catechism* every so often, and with the older kids, especially Confirmation classes, I'll make them all turn to the paragraph.

It's important to know how the *Catechism* works, because it's how all Church documents work. Numbered paragraphs are weird, but they sure are nice when it comes to finding something specific.

And who knew there was so much good stuff in the *Catechism*? And that it was so easy to read?

The Vatican has the *Catechism* online as straight text. The USCCB has made the *Catechism* into a flipbook, allowing you to read it like an actual book (note that it requires Adobe Flash on your computer). And St. Charles Borremeo Catholic Church in Mississippi has made the *Catechism* searchable online (which is great on so many levels!).

## YOUCAT

For many years, I used the *YOUCAT* with nearly every class I taught. It's indispensable and it's something that even adults can understand. I tell parents, whenever I can get their attention, that this is a resource they need to have in their home, one they need to also be familiar with.

The topics are set in question-and-answer format, so everyone who's a fan of the old *Baltimore Catechism* can perk up and get on board. The phrasing is modern and there's an index (which I hope to see improved and expanded).

Best of all, the *YOUCAT* cross-references with both the Bible and the *Catechism*, so you can read more about every topic. It's a sort of introductory text, but it's where almost everyone I know (myself included) need to start.

## *Lord of the Rings*

Though this is a series of books, not just one book, it often comes packaged all together. It's universally considered a classic series, and with good reason.

When I read *Lord of the Rings* the first time, I was in junior high. I had just moved for the second time, and I was in a new school *again*. I don't know what made me finally start to read the black paperback of the first book, but once I started, I couldn't stop. Looking back, I have gut feeling of my brain expanding as I read.

And it has held up with each subsequent rereading. I've appreciated the journey every time I jump back into it. The adventure is always exciting. The battles are always epic. The characters are always amazing.

Joseph Pearce writes that "the power of Tolkien lies in the way that he succeeds, through myth, in making the unseen hand of providence felt by the reader. In his mythical creations, or sub-creations as he would call them, he shows how the unseen hand of God is felt far more forcefully in myth than it is ever felt in fiction. Paradoxically, fiction works with facts, albeit invented facts, whereas myth works with truth, albeit truth dressed in fancy disguises. Furthermore, since facts are physical and truth is metaphysical, myth, being metaphysical, is spiritual."

## A go-to prayer book

Praying as a family can be easy. (Like before meals.) Or it can be a special kind of challenge.

Books don't solve that problem, but they can give you a focus. And sometimes you need different prayers for different seasons, and so the prayer book that you turn to changes.

Over the years, we've had a number of prayer books that have worked for us. The one shown in this picture is the *Catholic Family Prayer Book*, published by Our Sunday Visitor, that we received as a gift over a decade ago. It's pretty, but it's also out of print. 

That led me to find a few to recommend that are still in print.

- *Prayers for Our Catholic Family*, which is a booklet-style prayer book that's a short "best of" collection
- *Catholic Family Prayers*, which includes a nice selection of prayers (peek inside it here)

If you have a local Catholic bookstore, go there and see what they have. Sadly, there's not yet a consistent way to peek inside or to get an actual feel for books online. And if you have a recommendation to share, we'd love to hear it!

## Other people's thoughts

I couldn't help but pull together a sampling of the books other great readers recommend.

Brandon Vogt has a list of the best Catholic books of all time, and I can't argue with him.

Busted Halo lists ten books every Catholic should read.

*Crisis Magazine* has a piece from 1993 that recommends books for building your Catholic home library.

Douglas Beaumont has gathered five reference books for every Catholic to own. (And now I have to go add a few to my own list, because I don't have all of those!)

Fr. John Cush has compiled ten books that belong in every Catholic library. Personally, he had me at "reading has made many saints."

## Your turn: What book would you add to this list?

Because I know five is an insanely small number and that there are at least a dozen books I didn't (couldn't!) include! Share your recommendations below in the comments.