



"An extraordinary book! I have been a priest for 50 years and I don't know a book that has revitalized the faith of more people... or brought more people back to the Church than *Rediscover Catholicism*."

—FATHER RON RIEDER

Pastor, Saints Peter and Paul Church Huntington, Indiana

Rediscover Catholicism

A SPIRITUAL GUIDE TO LIVING
WITH PASSION & PURPOSE



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of *The Rhythm of Life*

Chapter One

OUR UNIVERSAL HUNGER

Throughout human history, there has never been a shortage of men and women willing to point humanity along the right path. Nor have the needs of the human family ever been a secret: food, shelter, meaningful work, companionship, freedom, forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

In every age, there is an abundance of people who try to speak to these very real human needs and announce the social implications particular to that time. These people stand at the crossroads and point humanity down a path they have never traveled themselves. In our own age, there is certainly no shortage of books, CDs, DVDs, podcasts, Web sites, radio shows, seminars, and television programs attempting to speak to our very real human needs in ways that are relevant and engaging.

But amid this apparent abundance there is a great poverty. I am not speaking of a material poverty. Rather, it seems in every place and in every time the shortage is always of men and women willing to *lead* humanity along the right path with the example of their own lives. In each moment of history authentic lives are ever so rare.

• Appearance vs. the Authentic •

Our own age seems to be governed by illusion and deception. We have built a whole culture based on appearance. Everything looks good, but scratch just below the surface, and you will discover little substance. Appearance has become a standard. We have grown so numb to the realities of good and evil that lying and cheating have become almost universally accepted as necessary evils. So we tolerate them, as long as they are performed in the dim

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light of *respectability*. Occasionally, in the midst of this cultural darkness, the great light of the human spirit shines forth with honesty and integrity. At those times we seem surprised, even taken off guard. Honesty, loyalty, and integrity seem almost out of place in the modern schema.

But beneath the surface, under the guise of appearances, this age, like any other, is made up of people like you and me. And if you listen carefully, if you look closely, you will discover that people are hungry. We were created to love and be loved, and there is a restlessness, a longing for more, a profound discontent with our lives and with our culture. We sense that something is missing, and deep within we know that nothing we can buy and no worldly pleasure will satisfy our restlessness.

This yearning preoccupies the human heart, and it is neither random nor accidental; everyone has it and we have it for a reason. The Holy Spirit (the “soul of our soul,” as Pope Benedict XVI calls him) is at the source of these longings. It is the presence of God in the most interior part of ourselves that calls us to move beyond the surface concerns of our lives, to explore and experience something deeper.

Our hunger is not for appearances, nor is it for the fleeting and superficial; it is for something of substance. We are hungry for truth. The people of today are starving for the authentic, thirsting for the tiniest droplet of sincerity, aching to experience the genuine.

• Why Has Christianity Been Rejected? •

The hunger for truth and goodness is enormous, and yet at the same time Christianity (and particularly Catholicism) has been largely rejected. There are, of course, many people who faithfully attend church each Sunday, but increasing numbers are choosing not to come to church. This is particularly true among younger generations.

Most of us know good, intelligent people, contributing members of our communities, who won't have anything to do with Christianity. Many of whom were raised as Christians in one form or another. Sooner or later, we must begin to explore this ever-increasing phenomenon and ask some probing

and uncomfortable questions: Is it possible that we failed to engage them? Did the hypocrisy of individual church members or leaders obscure their experience of God? Did we fail to feed them? Did we ever really welcome them?

Those of us who call ourselves Christian do so because we believe that the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the personification of truth, sincerity, and authenticity, and, in a practical sense, simply the best way to live. If we are correct in this belief, and if the people of the twenty-first century really are hungering for authenticity and the best way to live, then as Christians we must ask ourselves questions such as: Why are more people not enthusiastically embracing Christianity? Why, in fact, are so many people so hostile toward Christ and his Church?

I sense it is because the people of today believe that Christians, Christianity, and perhaps Catholics in particular are as much a part of this culture of appearance and deception as anyone else. This is a harsh truth that needs to be faced. People's desire for truth has not diminished, but they have become wary, doubtful, skeptical, and, sadly, even cynical in their search for truth. And to be honest, I cannot blame them for their attitude. I do not agree with their position, but I understand it. And perhaps more important, I can see how they arrived at that place of philosophical confusion and theological desolation.

The cause of much of this confusion is the unprecedented proliferation of words, symbols, images, and every manner of communication in the latter part of the twentieth century. People are tired; they are worn out, overloaded with information, and overwhelmed with the social, political, and economic climate. They are not *striving* to thrive; they are merely trying to survive. This is a tired culture.

• The Cry for Help •

This cultural fatigue is creating a hopelessness in the lives of more and more people every day, and from the midst of that fatigue and hopelessness they are crying out for help.

More than ever, our non-Christian and non-practicing brothers and sisters are sending you, me, and all of Christianity a message. Though they

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are probably not aware of it, they are indirectly giving witness to the Gospel. For within the message the people of our times are sending us, there is a profound challenge for you and me to embrace a life rooted more fully in the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. Their message is clear, unmistakable, and disarmingly simple. Our siblings, parents, and children are sending us this message, as are our friends, neighbors, and colleagues. They are saying, whispering, crying out, “Don’t tell me—*show* me!”

Their plea comes from a longing deep within them and represents their great hunger. They don’t want to see another television evangelist, they don’t want to read another book or hear another CD about Christianity, and they don’t want to hear your amazing story of conversion. They want the real thing. They want to witness someone, anyone—just one will do—living an authentic life, someone whose words are supported by the authority of his or her actions. Someone striving humbly but heroically to live by what is good, true, and noble in the midst of—and in spite of—the modern climate.

They are not sending us this message merely to sound the childish cry of “Hypocrite!” Rather, theirs is a natural cry, a cry for help. They are saying to us, “Don’t tell me—*show* me!” because they are so hungry for a courageous example of the authentic life, a life lived to the fullest, in this day and age. Seeing the conflicts and contradictions of your life and mine, they often cry “Hypocrite!” out of their hurt and anger. They are angry because the disappointment of discovering that we are not living the life we espouse robs them of their own hope to live an authentic life. They are disillusioned and searching, but they never cease calling out to us like sheep without a shepherd, wanting to be fed, wanting to be led to the pastures of kindness, compassion, generosity, forgiveness, acceptance, freedom, and love.

I have heard this cry a thousand times, but the words of one man echo in my mind like a bad dream that keeps returning to haunt a terrified child. They are the words of Mahatma Gandhi, a man for whom I have great admiration, who I believe strove with all his might to live an authentic life. I have

studied his life and writings, but one passage stands out. It speaks to me with a clarity that pierces my heart.

In reference to the well-known fact that Gandhi read from the New Testament every day and often quoted the Christian Scriptures, a reporter once asked him why he had never become a Christian. He answered, “If I had ever met one, I would have become one.” In his own way, Gandhi was saying, “Don’t tell me—*show* me!” revealing his yearning for an example of an authentic life.

All this being said, I also believe there is a desire within each of us to live an authentic life. We desire not only to witness authentic lives but also to live an authentic life ourselves. We genuinely want to be true to ourselves. At times, we have perhaps resolved to live such a life with all the fervor we could muster. But distracted by the sweet seduction of pleasure and possessions, we have wandered from the narrow path. We know the truth, but we lack the discipline and strength of character to align the actions of our lives with that truth (cf. Matthew 26:41). We have given ourselves over to a thousand different whims, cravings, and fantasies. Our lives have become merely a distortion of the truth we know and profess. We know the human family’s need for kindness, compassion, generosity, forgiveness, acceptance, freedom, and love, but we have divided our hearts with a thousand contradictions and compromises.

At every moment, the entire modern world kneels before us, begging, pleading, beckoning for some brave man or woman to come forward and lead them with the example of an authentic life.

In many respects our age is one of abundance, but amid this abundance (which at times may seem all prevailing) there remains a great hunger in the people of today. We have a universal hunger for the authentic, a longing to be and become and experience all we are capable of and created for. Everything good in the future (for ourselves, our marriages, our families, our communities, our Church, our nation, and humanity) depends on whether or not we will follow this longing.