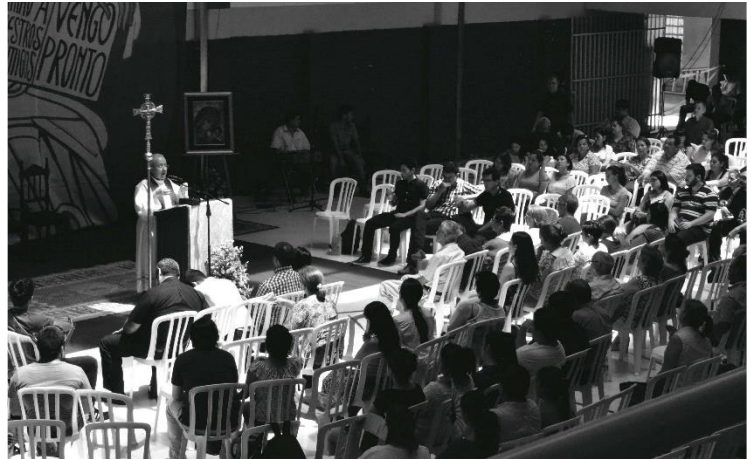




What is Catechesis?

For many of us, the word “catechesis” brings to mind tasks, such as learning prayers by heart or gathering weekly to cover the material in a textbook. This may be what catechesis often looks like, but on its own, doesn’t get at the heart of what catechesis truly is.



So, what is catechesis really about? In truth, catechesis is not about something; it is about someone. Authentic catechesis is an encounter

with Christ and an invitation to follow him ever more closely. Saint John Paul II described it as putting “people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, 5)

This grander vision for catechesis can be likened to building a ship. Antoine De Saint-Exupery is said to have advised, “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

Similarly, rather than simply assigning students the tasks and work of memorizing prayers, reading their textbook, or reciting the 10 Commandments, an effective catechist awakens within the students’ heart a longing for the God of infinite love.

Catechesis that inspires this desire and communicates “the living mystery of God” bears fruit not only in a knowledge of the content of the faith, but a pattern of Christian living shaped by its essential truths.

PUTTING “PEOPLE NOT ONLY IN TOUCH BUT IN COMMUNION, IN INTIMACY, WITH JESUS CHRIST...”

- St. John Paul II



The Identity and Vocation of the Catechist



From the first apostles to the present moment, missionary disciples have made “the proclamation of [Christ’s] passion, death and resurrection continually resound in the heart of every person, so that his life may be transformed.” (*Directory for Catechesis*, 55)

The ministry of the catechist arises from the missionary mandate of the Lord to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name

of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28: 19-20). Catechists, called and guided by the Holy Spirit, are to set out and encounter “all those who are waiting to discover the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Christian faith.” (*Antiquum Ministerium*, 5) That is to say, we are to proclaim the Gospel in such a way that shows that to believe in and to follow Christ is something beautiful and joyful.

Having been transformed by God’s love and grace, we hand on what we ourselves have received (cf. 1 Cor 11:23). Indeed, our fundamental identity as catechists “springs from the Sacrament of Baptism through which all believers come to share in the prophetic ministry of Christ and the evangelizing mission of the Church.” (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 54) We evangelize primarily by our “witness of an authentically Christian life.”

As lay catechists, our personal witness can be particularly effective “because [we] know the ordinary experiences of everyday life so well and are able to incarnate the Gospel in those ordinary circumstances.” (NDC, 54)

FOR I RECEIVED FROM THE LORD WHAT I
ALSO HANDED ON TO YOU...

- (1 Cor 11:23)

We can share honestly about our own efforts to practice what we preach when we too struggle to prioritize prayer in an often- hectic schedule or to speak out when a classmate or co-worker is mistreated.



Catechesis in the Lives of Persons

In considering such examples from everyday life, we bring “the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures,” following the model of Christ’s Incarnation as a “concrete man, in space and time and rooted in a specific culture.” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 109) The more we contemplate “the questions, aspirations and interior needs” of our students, the better we can communicate the message of the Gospel. Taking the time to truly get to know the persons with whom we work is indispensable if we are to identify and “create the most advantageous conditions for seeking out, welcoming and deepening the Christian message.” (GDC, 156)

Being mindful of those whom we serve is more than a simple consideration for being an effective teacher. The Church, who “evangelizes and is herself evangelized,” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24) models for us the necessity of listening and discernment. Essential to the catechetical dynamic is “accompaniment, education, and formation in the faith and for the faith, an introduction to the celebration of the Mystery, illumination and interpretation of human life and history.” (*Directory for Catechesis*, 55)



A good catechist doesn’t just make an appearance once a week in the life of one’s students. He or she walks with them along their journey of faith, helping them to make the connection between Christ’s life and their own.

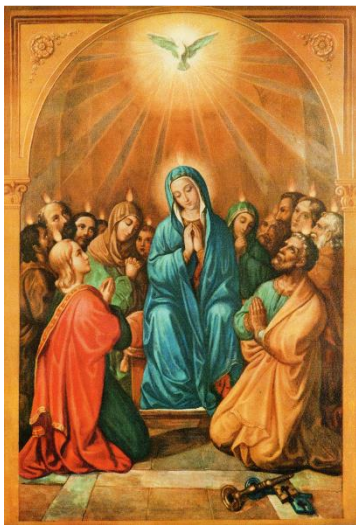
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- *Directory for Catechesis*, no. 55



When we do the work of catechesis well, those we catechize are “an active subject, conscious and co-responsible, and not merely a silent and passive recipient.” (GDC, 167) They are empowered to interpret their events of their life and of history in the light of Christ’s suffering, death, and Resurrection.

The Church, Mother and Teacher



There are many things to attend to in this work of catechesis, and we may at times feel overwhelmed, but we are not alone! As mother and teacher, the Church orients us by means of various written resources (such as the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, the [General Directory for Catechesis](#) and the recent Directory for Catechesis, as well as the [United States Catholic Catechism for Adults](#)).

We can also draw upon the “incomparable treasure of pedagogy in the faith: above all the witness of saints and catechists...” (GDC, 141) throughout the centuries. These men and women experienced many of the same joys and challenges, doubts and difficulties we do now. Lay and religious from every continent, from antiquity, like Saint Augustine to more modern times, like Blessed Carlo Acutis, offer us guidance by their example and counsel.

May we rely on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit — “the interior Teacher” — and entrust our ministry, our very selves, and each of those we catechize and their families to the unfailing intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother and model of catechists.

This Resource was compiled by Fatima Monterrubio Cruess, Resource Coordinator at the **Catholic Apostolate Center**. You can find more resources like this at our website, **CatholicApostolateCenter.org**.

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