

# The Catechetical method

"The definitive aim of catechesis is to put 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)

Our goal here is to review some ideas for preparation and stages in a catechetical session.

## Stage A: Getting Ready

As a catechist you should be in a regular habit of prayer and so start your time of preparation with prayer. There is a wonderful selection of prayers in appendix A of the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Compendium and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are essential reading for all Catholics and especially catechist. If do not have a copy of these books, Stop! Get them before you going any further. You can also view them on-line at the Vatican website. Ready through the scripture you will use for the session and also the section in the catechism that you will be using.

"This step suggests that the catechist must help create the conditions for the possibility of deepening God's Word in the hearts of those being served. This is no easy task in the setting of modern, hectic life in the Western world, where the individual is daily subjected to a barrage of stimuli from the media of communication, advertising, competing ideologies, etc." (Kelly, 138)

The first part of preparation is the setting of the room. The room should be a place set apart. This can be difficult to accomplish in some instances. Consider, for instance, a sacred space. A place in the room, such as a small table, with liturgical colours, a crucifix, a Bible open to a passage you will be using that day. Whenever you can, lead them to the liturgy, where our community worship takes place.

Always start your session with a time of prayer. You could use a prayer from the divine office or a devotional prayer and a reading from Scripture. Music or a hymn should also be used when possible.

## Stage B: Announce

"It is this aspect that from the start gave us the word catechesis - coming from the Greek word meaning to re-echo, to resound the Word of God." (Kelly, 141).

Catechists know that most people will not remember everything that they hear in a session. In fact, if we can get people to remember, even one fact, one important point from the day, a catechist has been successful. The second stage is to announce the Word of God to the group. The announcement should be rooted in the truths of the faith. It should be simple, and encompass the whole aim or point of the session. Always know what point about the subject is important and return to your core points several times in the session. Try to avoid starting a debate or discussion about the topic. You are announcing, The Good News and not starting a debate on Newsnight! Be clear about what are the points you want people to take away from the session to reflect on, study further and pray over.

## Stage C: Illumination

"In the third step, in a certain sense, the catechists' personal creativity is now more challenged and evoked so that they may help participants come to a deeper personal understanding and assimilation of the message of faith. This explanation that will be made will, of course, be always in the light of the Church's understanding of the Word, but the catechist is challenged to find appropriate ways to "inculturate" this message so that it can be adapted to diverse groups to whom it is addressed." (Kelly, 143)

Any explanation of the topic should always come back to God and rely on God and not on how clever the catechist seems to be. The focus of a catechetical session is on God revealed through Jesus Christ. The catechist acts as the finger pointing to the truth of Christ. If people only focus on how wonderful or terrible the catechist is, then the session has little worth. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the "sure norm" for teaching the faith, use it. Know it as well as you know scripture (assuming of course that you know scripture well, and if you don't, well, what is stopping you?). Consider the key terms that people may not know yet and be sure to explain them. Don't ever let your delivery of the Church's teaching simply be a lecture. Remember the various ways people learn. Use DVD clips, art, music and other material (get them to move around) as often as you can in the session. The more outrageous it is, the more memorable it is, but don't take that too far of course. Put together a presentation that will capture the attention of the people, and help them understand the teaching of the church, while giving them an opportunity for a change of heart in their own lives.

### **Stage D: Relevance**

"In biblical and ecclesial terms, what is hoped for as a result of catechesis is a life of "witness" and service." In the fourth step of catechesis , as I envision it, the focus is on having the truth and knowledge acquired in the prior steps now bear fruit. This involves a deeper level of conversion in the person being catechized and a commitment to expressing this conversion in his or her lifestyle." (Kelly 145)

Now is the time for people to start thinking about how the presentation is relevant to helping them live the Gospel in their own lives. How are we going to apply this teaching to our everyday life?

### **Stage E: Celebration**

"If the catechetical process begins, as I have suggested, in prayerful attentiveness and openness to the Word of God, I believe that it must also end in a prayerful gratitude and praise to God." (Kelly, 146)

End as you began, with a prayer, scripture and a song.

"The cross should be one of the major symbols we use in our catechetical celebrations: 'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Gal 6:14)." (Kelly 147)

May we come to Jesus. May we dwell in Jesus. May we learn to love Jesus even more. May we call on the name of Jesus. May we find the<sup>i</sup> Saviour, King, Lord, Brother, and God in Him. May we learn to decrease as He increases in their lives. May Jesus Christ live in us. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

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<sup>i</sup> "The Mystery we Proclaim: Catechesis for the Third Millennium" by Msgr. Francis D. Kelly (available from Amazon.com; published by Our Sunday Visitor 1999, ISBN 087973597X)