

CHAPTER II

The Identity of Catechesis

1. THE NATURE OF CATECHESIS

55. Catechesis is an ecclesial act, arising from the missionary mandate of the Lord (cf. Mt 28:19-20) and aimed, as its very name indicates,¹ at making the proclamation of his passion, death and resurrection continually resound in the heart of every person, so that his life may be transformed. A dynamic and complex reality at the service of the Word of God, it 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. By harmoniously integrating these characteristics, catechesis expresses the richness of its essence and offers its specific contribution to the pastoral mission of the Church.

56. Catechesis, a privileged stage in the process of evangelization, is generally directed toward persons who have already received the first proclamation, within whom it promotes the processes of initiation, growth, and maturation in the faith. It is however true that, if it is still useful to make conceptual distinctions between *pre-evangelization*, *first proclamation*, *catechesis*, *ongoing formation*, in the present context it is no longer possible to stress such differences. In fact, on the one hand those today who ask for or have already received the grace of the sacraments often do not have an explicit experience of faith or do not intimately know its power and warmth; on the other, a formal proclamation limited to the bare enunciation of the concepts of the faith would not permit an understanding of the faith itself, which is instead a new horizon of life that is opened wide, starting from the encounter with the Lord Jesus.

THE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KERYGMA AND CATECHESIS

57. This demand to which the Church must respond at the present time brings into focus the need for a catechesis that in a consistent way can be called *kerygmatic*, meaning a catechesis that is an “entering more deeply into the *kerygma*.”² Catechesis, which cannot always be distinguished from the first proclamation, is called to be in the first place a proclamation of the faith, and must not pass on to other ecclesial actions the task of assisting in the discovery of the beauty of the Gospel. It is important that every person should discover that belief is worthwhile precisely through catechesis, which in this way is no longer limited to being a mere time of more harmonious growth in the faith but contributes to generating faith itself and allows the discovery of its greatness and credibility. The proclamation can therefore no longer be considered simply the first stage of faith, preliminary to catechesis, but rather the essential dimension of every moment of catechesis.

58. The *kerygma*, “the fire of the Spirit [that] is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father’s infinite mercy,”³ is simultaneously an *act of proclamation* and the content of the proclamation itself, which unveils the Gospel and makes it present.⁴ In the *kerygma*, the active figure is the Lord Jesus, who manifests himself in the testimony of the one who proclaims him; the life of the witness who has experienced salvation there-

² EG 165.

³ EG 164.

⁴ On the term “gospel”: Cf. Benedict XVI, *Meditation of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI during the first General Congregation* (October 8, 2012): “‘Gospel’ means: God has broken his silence, God has spoken, God exists. This fact in itself is salvation: God knows us, God loves us, he has entered into history. Jesus is his Word, God with us, God showing us that he loves us, that he suffers with us until death and rises again. This is the Gospel. God has spoken, he is no longer the great unknown, but has shown himself: and this is salvation.”

¹ The Greek verb *katechein* means “resound,” “make resound.”

fore becomes that which touches and moves the hearer. The New Testament presents different formulations of the *kerygma*⁵ that respond to the various ways in which salvation is understood, as it is enunciated with distinctive accents in the various cultures and for different persons. In the same way, the Church must be able to embody the *kerygma* according to the needs of her contemporaries, providing help and encouragement so that on the lips of the catechists (cf. Rom 10:8-10), from the fullness of their hearts (cf. Mt 12:34), in a reciprocal dynamic of listening and dialogue (cf. Lk 24:13-35), there may blossom credible proclamations, vital *confessions of faith*, new *Christological hymns* for telling everyone the good news: "Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you."⁶

59. The centrality of the *kerygma* for the proclamation leads to several guidelines for catechesis as well: "it has to express God's saving love which precedes any moral and religious obligation on our part; it should not impose the truth but appeal to freedom; it should be marked by joy, encouragement, liveliness and a harmonious balance which will not reduce preaching to a few doctrines which are at times more philosophical than evangelical."⁷ The elements that catechesis as an echo of the *kerygma* is called upon to emphasize are: the nature of what is proposed; the narrative, affective, and existential quality; the dimension of witness to the faith; the relational attitude; the focus on salvation. In truth, all of this raises questions

5 Among the many formulations of the *kerygma*, by way of example, cf. the following: "Jesus is the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us" (Cf. Mt 1:23); "the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15); "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16); "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10); Jesus of Nazareth "went about doing good and healing all" (Acts 10:38); "Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rm 4:25); "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3); "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3); "the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

6 EG 164.

7 EG 165.

for the Church herself, called to be the first to rediscover the Gospel that she proclaims: the new *proclamation* of the Gospel asks of the Church a renewed *listening* to the Gospel, together with her hearers.

60. Since "The *kerygma* has a clear social content,"⁸ it is important that the social dimension of evangelization be made explicit in such a way as to grasp its openness to all of existence. This means that the efficacy of catechesis is visible not only through the direct proclamation of the Lord's Paschal mystery, but also through its revelation of a new vision of life, of humanity, of justice, of social existence, of the whole cosmos which emerges from the faith and which makes its signs concretely present. For this reason, the presentation of the light with which the Gospel enlightens society is not a second moment chronologically distinct from the proclamation of the faith itself. Catechesis is a proclamation of the faith, and as such cannot help but pertain, albeit in an embryonic fashion, to all the dimensions of human life.

THE CATECHUMENATE AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR CATECHESIS

61. The requirement "not [to] assume that our audience understands the full background to what we are saying, or is capable of relating what we say to the very heart of the Gospel"⁹ is the reason both for affirming the *kerygmatic* nature of catechesis and for considering its catechumenal inspiration. The catechumenate is an ancient ecclesial practice, restored after the Vatican Council (cf. SC 64-66; CD 14; AG 14), offered to unbaptized converts. It therefore has an explicit missionary intention and is structured as an organic and cumulative whole for initiation into Christian faith and life. Precisely because of its missionary character, the catechumenate can also inspire the catechesis directed toward those who,

8 EG 177.

9 EG 34.

although they have already received the gift of baptismal grace, do not actually taste its richness:¹⁰ in this sense, one speaks of catechesis *inspired by the catechumenal model* or a *post-baptismal catechumenate* or a *catechesis of initiation into Christian life*.¹¹ This inspiration does not forget that the baptized “by baptism . . . have already become members of the Church and children of God. Hence their conversion is based on the baptism they have already received, the effects of which they must develop.”¹²

62. In reference to the participants, one can speak of three catechumenal initiatives:

- a *catechumenate in the strict sense* for the unbaptized, whether young people and adults or school-age children and adolescents;
- a *catechumenate in an analogous sense* for the baptized who have not completed the sacraments of Christian initiation;
- a *catechesis of catechumenal inspiration* for those who have received the sacraments of initiation but are not yet sufficiently evangelized or catechized, or for those who desire to resume the journey of faith.

63. The restoration of the catechumenate fostered by the Second Vatican Council was realized with the publication of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. The catechumenate, “a training period in the whole Christian life” (AG 14), is a process structured in three phases or periods, aimed at leading the catechumen to the full encounter with the mystery of Christ in the life of the community, and is therefore considered a *typical setting* of initiation, catechesis,

and mystagogy. The rites of passage¹³ between phases highlight the gradual nature of the formative itinerary of the catechumen:

- in the *pre-catechumenate* the first evangelization for the sake of conversion takes place, and the *kerygma* of the first proclamation is presented;
- the period of the *catechumenate* properly so called is set aside for comprehensive catechesis; entrance to it is gained with the *Rite of Admission*, in which the “handing on of the Gospels”¹⁴ may take place;
- the time of *purification* and *illumination* provides a more intense preparation for the sacraments of initiation; this period, which is entered into through the *Rite of Election* or the *inscribing of names*, provides for the “handing on of the Creed” and the “handing on of the Lord’s Prayer”;¹⁵
- The *celebration of the sacraments of initiation* at the Easter Vigil opens the time of *mystagogy*, characterized by an ever deeper experience of the mysteries of the faith and by incorporation into the life of the community.¹⁶

64. The *catechumenal inspiration of catechesis* does not mean reproducing the catechumenate in a servile manner, but taking on its style and its formative dynamism, responding also to the “need for a mystagogical renewal, one which would assume very different forms based on each educational community’s discernment.”¹⁷ The

10 These persons can be called quasi-catechumens: cf. CT 44.

11 Cf. CCC 1231 and Benedict XVI, *Address at the inaugural session of the fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean* (May 30, 2007), 286-288.

12 RCIA 295.

13 RCIA 6: “These three steps are to be regarded as the major, more intense moments of initiation and are marked by three liturgical rites: the first by the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens; the second by the rite of election or enrolment of names; and the third by the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation.”

14 This period provides for celebrations of the word of God, exorcisms, blessings, and other ceremonies. Cf. RCIA 68-132.

15 Together with the conferrals mentioned, during this period the catechumen experiences the examinations and other ceremonies preparatory to the celebration of the sacraments. Cf. RICA 133-207.

16 EG 166.

17 EG 166.

catechumenate has an inherent missionary character, which in catechesis has become weakened over time. The essential elements of the catechumenate are being brought back, and after the necessary discernment they must be understood, valued, and implemented again today with courage and creativity, in an effort of true inculturation. Such elements are:

- a. the *Paschal character*: in the catechumenate, everything is oriented toward the mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection. Catechesis communicates the heart of the faith in an essential and existentially understandable way, bringing each person into contact with the Risen One and helping him to reinterpret and to live the most intense moments of his life as Paschal events;
- b. the *initiator character*: the catechumenate is an initiation into faith that leads catechumens to the discovery of the mystery of Christ and of the Church. Catechesis provides an introduction to all the dimensions of Christian life, helping each one to initiate, within the community, his personal journey of response to God who has sought him out;
- c. the *liturgical, ritual, and symbolic character*: the catechumenate is interwoven with symbols, rites, and celebrations that touch the senses and the affections. Catechesis, precisely thanks to the "use of eloquent symbols" and through a "renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs"¹⁸ can respond in this way to the demands of contemporary people, who typically see as significant only those experiences which touch their physical and emotional being;
- d. the *community character*: the catechumenate is a process that takes place in a concrete community, that provides an experience of the communion given by God and is therefore aware of its responsibility for the proclamation of the faith. Catechesis inspired by the catechumenate integrates

the contribution of various charisms and ministries (catechists, those who work in liturgy and charity, heads of ecclesial groups, together with the ordained ministers . . .), revealing that the womb of regeneration in faith is the whole community;

- e. the *character of ongoing conversion and of witness*: the catechumenate is imagined, in its ensemble, as a journey of conversion and gradual purification, also enhanced with ceremonies that mark the attainment of a new way of existing and of thinking. Catechesis, aware that conversion is never fully accomplished but lasts a whole lifetime, teaches believers to discover that they are pardoned sinners and, drawing upon the rich patrimony of the Church, also provides specific penitential and formative paths that foster the conversion of heart and mind in a new way of life that should also be apparent from the outside;
- f. the *progressive character of the formative experience*:¹⁹ the catechumenate is a dynamic process structured in periods that succeed one another in a gradual and progressive way. This evolving character responds to the actual life story of the person, who grows and matures over time. The Church, patiently accompanying her children and respecting the pace of their maturing, shows herself to be an attentive mother.

65. Catechesis in a *kerygmatic* and missionary vein requires a pedagogy of initiation inspired by the catechumenal journey, responding with pastoral wisdom to the plurality of situations. In other words, according to an understanding that has been developed in various Churches, this is a matter of the *catechesis of initiation into Christian life*. It is a pedagogical journey offered in the ecclesial community, which leads the believer to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the word of God, liturgical action, and charity, integrating all the dimensions of the person so

¹⁹ EG 166; cf. also RICA 4-6.

that he may grow in the mentality of faith and be a witness of new life in the world.

2. CATECHESIS IN THE PROCESS OF EVANGELIZATION

FIRST PROCLAMATION AND CATECHESIS

66. With the first proclamation, the Church announces the Gospel and elicits conversion. In ordinary pastoral practice, this moment of the process of evangelization is fundamental. In the mission *ad gentes*, it is realized in the period referred to as the pre-catechumenate. At the present time of the new evangelization the preference is to speak, as has already been presented, of *kerygmatic* catechesis.

67. In the context of the mission *ad gentes*, the first proclamation is to be understood mainly in the chronological sense. In fact, "to reveal Jesus Christ and his Gospel to those who do not know them has been, ever since the morning of Pentecost, the fundamental program which the Church has taken on as received from her Founder." She carries out the first proclamation "by a complex and diversified activity which is sometimes termed 'pre-evangelization' but which is already evangelization in a true sense, although at its initial and still incomplete stage."²⁰ Catechesis develops this initial moment and brings it to maturity. Therefore, the first proclamation and catechesis, although distinct, are complementary.

68. In many ecclesial contexts, the first proclamation also has a second meaning. "This first proclamation is called 'first' not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one

way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment."²¹ The first proclamation, the task of every Christian, is based on that "go" (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19) which Jesus gave as an instruction to his disciples and which implies going out, making haste, accompanying, thus becoming true missionary disciples. It therefore cannot be reduced to the conveying of a message, but is first of all sharing the life that comes from God and communicating the joy of having met the Lord. "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."²²

CATECHESIS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

69. The catechesis of Christian initiation connects *missionary* action, which issues a call to faith, with the *pastoral* action that continually nourishes it. Catechesis is an integral part of Christian initiation and is firmly bound up with the sacraments of initiation, especially with Baptism. "The link uniting catechesis and Baptism is true profession of faith, which is at once an element inherent in this sacrament and the goal of catechesis."²³ "The mission to baptize, and so the sacramental mission, is implied in the mission to evangelize";²⁴ therefore the sacramental mission cannot be separated from the process of evangelization. In fact, the ritual itinerary of Christian initiation is an actualized process of doctrine that not only takes place in the Church, but constitutes her. In Christian initiation it is not a question of simply enunciating the Gospel, but also of putting it into practice.

70. The sacraments of Christian initiation constitute a unity because "they establish the foundations of Christian life. The

²¹ EG 164.

²² Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005) 1.

²³ GDC 66.

²⁴ CCC 1122.

faithful born anew by Baptism are strengthened by Confirmation and are then nourished by the Eucharist.”²⁵ It must be reiterated, in fact, that “our reception of Baptism and Confirmation is ordered to the Eucharist. Accordingly, our pastoral practice should reflect a more unitary understanding of the process of Christian initiation.”²⁶ It is therefore appropriate to evaluate and consider the theological order of the sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist—in order to “[see] which practice better enables the faithful to put the sacrament of the Eucharist at the center, as the goal of the whole process of initiation.”²⁷ It is desirable that where experiments are carried out, these be not isolated cases but the fruit of a reflection of the whole episcopal conference that confirms the practical decisions for the entire territory under its supervision.

71. The catechesis of Christian initiation is a *basic, essential, organic, systematic, and integral* formation in the faith:

- *basic and essential*, in that it is an initial exploration of the *kerygma* that presents the fundamental mysteries of the faith and the basic evangelical values. “[It] lays the foundation of the spiritual edifice of the Christian, nurtures the roots of his faith life and enables him to receive more solid nourishment in the ordinary life of the Christian community”;²⁸
- *organic*, in that it is coherent and well-organized; *systematic*, meaning not improvised or casual. The organic and systematic exposition of the Christian mystery distinguishes catechesis from other forms of proclamation of the word of God;
- *integral*, because it is a form of learning that is open to all the components of the Christian life. Catechesis gradually fosters the internalization and integration of these components,

eliciting a transformation of the old man and the formation of a Christian mentality.

72. These characteristics of the catechesis of initiation are expressed in an exemplary manner in the *summaries* of faith already elaborated by Scripture (like the trio of faith, hope, charity) and then in Tradition (the faith believed, celebrated, lived, and prayed). These summaries are a way of harmoniously understanding life and history, because they do not enunciate theological positions that may be interesting but are always partial; rather, they proclaim the very faith of the Church.

CATECHESIS AND ONGOING FORMATION IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

73. Catechesis is placed at the service of the believer’s response of faith, enabling him to live the Christian life in a state of conversion. This is in essence a matter of fostering the internalization of the Christian message, through that catechetical dynamism which in its progression knows how to integrate listening, discernment, and purification. Such catechetical action is not limited to the individual believer, but is addressed to the whole Christian community in order to support the missionary commitment of evangelization. Catechesis also encourages the incorporation of individuals and of the community into the social and cultural context, assisting the Christian interpretation of history and fostering the social commitment of Christians.

74. Catechesis, being at the service of ongoing education in the faith, exists in relationship with the different dimensions of the Christian life.

- a. *Catechesis and Sacred Scripture*: Knowledge of Sacred Scripture is essential for making progress in the life of faith; its centrality in catechesis makes it possible to transmit

25 *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 251.

26 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007) 17.

27 *Ibid.*, 18.

28 GDC 67.

salvation history in a lively way, and “a knowledge of biblical personages, events and well-known sayings should therefore thus be encouraged.”²⁹

- b. *Catechesis, liturgy and the sacraments*: catechesis is oriented to the liturgical celebration. It is necessary that there be both a catechesis that prepares for the sacraments and a mystagogical catechesis that fosters an understanding and a deeper experience of the liturgy.
- c. *Catechesis, charity and witness*: while catechesis, echoing the Gospel, molds the believer for charity, charitable action is an integral part of the catechetical proclamation. Charity is not only a sign of the reception of the Gospel, but also a privileged way of accessing the Gospel: “he who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 Jn 4:7).

3. GOALS OF CATECHESIS

75. At the center of every process of catechesis is the living encounter with Christ. “Accordingly, 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.”³⁰ Communion with Christ is the center of the Christian life, and as a result the center of catechetical action. Catechesis is oriented toward forming persons who get to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel of liberating salvation ever better; who live a profound encounter with him and who choose his own way of life and his very sentiments (cf. Phil 2:5), striving to realize, in the historical situations in which they live, the mission of Christ, which is the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

29 Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010), 74. Appreciation should be shown for all the initiatives that present Sacred Scripture in its pre-eminent pastoral role, like the *Sunday of the Word of God*: cf. Francis, Apostolic Letter *Aperuit illis* (September 30, 2019).

30 CT 5.

76. The encounter with Christ involves the person in his totality: heart, mind, senses. It does not concern only the mind, but also the body and above all the heart. In this sense catechesis, which helps in the internalization of the faith and thereby makes an irreplaceable contribution to the encounter with Christ, is not alone in fostering the pursuit of this goal. It is joined in this by the other dimensions of the life of faith: in liturgical-sacramental experience, in affective relationships, in community life and the service of one's brothers, something essential in fact takes place for the *birth of the new man* (cf. Eph 4:24) and for personal spiritual *transformation* (cf. Rom 12:2).

77. Catechesis makes the initial conversion ripen and helps Christians to give a complete meaning to their existence, educating them in a *mentality of faith* in keeping with the Gospel,³¹ to the point of gradually coming to feel, think and act like Christ. On this journey, in which a decisive contribution comes from the participant himself with his personality, the capacity to receive the Gospel is commensurate with the person's existential situation and phase of growth.³² It must however be noted that “catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it. This implies that the catechesis of other age groups should have it for a point of reference.”³³

78. Communion with Christ implies the confession of faith in the one God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. “The profession of faith inherent in Baptism is eminently Trinitarian. The Church baptizes ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’

31 In EN 44, the goal of catechesis is “to form patterns of Christian living.”

32 On the process of the personal reception of the faith, cf. no. 396 of the present Directory.

33 GDC 59; cf. also Congregation for the Clergy *General Directory for Catechesis* (April 11, 1971), 20 and CT 43.

(Mt 28:19), the triune God to whom the Christian entrusts his life. [...] It is important that catechesis should unite well the confession of christological faith, 'Jesus is Lord,' with the trinitarian confession, 'I believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,' in such a way that there are not two modes of expressing the Christian faith. He who is converted to Jesus Christ and recognizes him as Lord through the primary proclamation of the Gospel begins a process which, aided by catechesis, necessarily leads to explicit confession of the Trinity."³⁴ This confession is certainly a personal act of the individual, but it attains its fullness only if it is made in the Church.

4. TASKS OF CATECHESIS

79. In order to achieve its goals, catechesis pursues several interconnected tasks that are inspired by the way in which Jesus formed his disciples: he got them to *know* the mysteries of the Kingdom, taught them to *pray*, proposed to them *gospel values*, initiated them into the life of *communion* with him and among themselves, and into *mission*. This pedagogy of Jesus then molded the life of the Christian community: "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The faith, in fact, demands to be known, celebrated, lived, and turned into prayer. In order to form believers for an integral Christian life, catechesis therefore pursues the following tasks: leading to knowledge of the faith; initiating into the celebration of the mystery; forming for life in Christ; teaching to pray; and introducing to community life.

LEADING TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH

80. Catechesis has the task of fostering the knowledge and exploration of the Christian message. In this way it helps the believer to know the truths of the Christian faith, introduces him

to the knowledge of Sacred Scripture and of the Church's living Tradition, fosters knowledge of the *Creed (Symbol of the faith)* and the creation of a coherent doctrinal vision that can be used as a reference in life. It is important not to underestimate this cognitive dimension of the faith and to be attentive to integrating it into the educational process of integral Christian maturation. A catechesis, in fact, that sets up an opposition between the content and the experience of faith would show itself to be worthless. Without the experience of faith one would be deprived of a true encounter with God and with one's brothers; the absence of content would block the maturation of faith, keeping one from finding meaning in the Church and living the encounter and exchange with others.

INITIATING INTO THE CELEBRATION OF THE MYSTERY

81. Catechesis, in addition to fostering the living knowledge of the mystery of Christ, also has the task of assisting in the comprehension and experience of liturgical celebrations. Through this task, catechesis helps the believer to understand the importance of the liturgy in the Church's life, initiates him into the knowledge of the sacraments and into sacramental life, especially the sacrament of the Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church. The sacraments, celebrated in the liturgy, are a special means that fully communicate him who is proclaimed by the Church.

82. Catechesis, moreover, educates the believer in the attitudes that the Church's celebrations require: joy for the festive quality of celebrations, a sense of community, attentive listening to the word of God, confident prayer, praise and thanksgiving, awareness of symbols and signs. Through conscious and active participation in the liturgical celebrations, catechesis teaches the believer to understand the liturgical year, the true teacher of the faith, and the significance of Sunday, the day of the Lord and of the Christian

community. Catechesis also aids in the appreciation of the expressions of faith found in popular piety.

FORMING FOR LIFE IN CHRIST

83. Catechesis has the task of making the heart of every Christian resound with the call to live a new life in keeping with the dignity of children of God received in Baptism and with the life of the Risen One that is communicated through the sacraments. This task consists in showing that the response to the lofty vocation to holiness (cf. LG 40)³⁵ is a filial way of life that is capable of bringing every situation back to the way of truth and happiness that is Christ. In this sense, catechesis instructs the believer in following the Lord according to the dispositions described in the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12), which manifest his very life. "Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card."³⁶

84. In the same way, the catechetical task of educating the believer to the good life of the Gospel involves the Christian formation of the moral conscience, so that in every circumstance he may listen to the Father's will in order to discern, under the guidance of the Spirit and in harmony with the law of Christ (cf. Gal 6:2), the evil to be avoided and the good to be done and putting this into practice with diligent charity. This is why it is important to teach the believer to draw from the commandment of charity developed from the *Decalogue* (cf. Ex 20:1-17; Dt 5:6-21) and from the virtues, both human and Christian, guidelines for acting as Christians in the different areas of life. Not forgetting that the Lord came to give life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10), catechesis should know how to point out "the attractiveness and the ideal of a life of wisdom,

self-fulfillment and enrichment" so as to make believers "joyful messengers of challenging proposals, guardians of the goodness and beauty which shine forth in a life of fidelity to the Gospel."³⁷

85. Moreover it should be kept in mind that the response to the common Christian vocation is realized in an incarnate manner, because every child of God, according to the measure of his freedom, listening to God and recognizing the charisms entrusted by him, has the responsibility of discovering his own role in the plan of salvation. Moral instruction in catechesis is therefore always imparted against a *vocational background*, looking first of all at one's life as the first and fundamental vocation. Every form of catechesis is to do all it can to illustrate the dignity of the Christian vocation, to provide accompaniment in the discernment of specific vocations, to help the believer to solidify his state in life. It is up to catechetical action to demonstrate that the faith lived in a commitment to loving as Christ did, is the way to foster the coming of the kingdom of God in the world and to hope in the promise of eternal beatitude.

TEACHING PRAYER

86. Prayer is first of all a gift from God; in fact, in every one of the baptized "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26). Catechesis has the task of educating the believer for prayer and in prayer, developing the contemplative dimension of Christian experience. It is necessary to teach him to pray with Jesus Christ and like him: "To learn to pray with Jesus is to pray with the same sentiments with which he turned to the Father: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, filial confidence, supplication and awe for his glory. All of these sentiments are reflected in the Our Father, the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples and which is the model of all Christian prayer [. . .] When catechesis is permeated

³⁵ On the call to holiness in the contemporary world, see: Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate* (March 19, 2018).

³⁷ EG 168.

by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit.”³⁸

87. This task implies the teaching of both personal prayer and liturgical and community prayer, initiating the believer into the *permanent forms of prayer*: blessing and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.³⁹ There are several well-established means for achieving these ends: the prayerful reading of sacred scripture, in particular through the liturgy of the hours and *lectio divina*; the prayer of the heart called the Jesus prayer,⁴⁰ the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary through practices of piety like the holy Rosary, supplications, processions, etc.

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY LIFE

88. The faith is professed, celebrated, expressed, and lived above all in community: “The communitarian dimension is not just a ‘frame,’ an ‘outline,’ but an integral part of the Christian life, of witness and of evangelization.”⁴¹ This is well expressed in the classical principle: “*Idem velle atque idem nolle*—to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing—was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought.”⁴² What makes this possible is cultivating a *spirituality of communion*. This makes one able to see the light of the Trinity reflected in the face of one’s brother as well, feeling through the profound unity of the mystical Body that he is part of oneself; sharing his joys and sufferings in

³⁸ GDC 85.

³⁹ Cf. CCC 2626-2649.

⁴⁰ CCC 435: “The prayer of the heart, the Jesus Prayer, says: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’” The formula pronounced with the mouth is progressively received by the intellect and then descends into the heart and creates an *intelligent heart*, unifying the inner person and making him whole.

⁴¹ Francis, general audience (January 15, 2014).

⁴² Benedict XVI. Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), 17.

order to perceive his desires; taking care of his needs; offering him a true and profound friendship. Looking above all at what is positive in the other in order to cherish him as a gift from God helps one to reject the selfish temptations that lead to competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.

89. Catechesis, in reference to preparation for community life, therefore has the task of developing the sense of *belonging* to the Church; teaching the sense of ecclesial *communion*, promoting the acceptance of the Magisterium, communion with pastors, fraternal dialogue; forming believers in the sense of ecclesial *co-responsibility*, contributing as active participants to building up the community and as missionary disciples to its growth.

5. SOURCES OF CATECHESIS

90. The sources which catechesis draws upon are to be considered as being interrelated: one points to the other, while all can be traced back to the word of God, of which they are an expression. Catechesis may accentuate, according to the participants and contexts, one of the sources over and above the others but this must be done with balance and without practicing a one-dimensional catechesis (for example, a catechesis that is exclusively biblical, liturgical or experiential . . .). Among the sources, Sacred Scripture clearly has pre-eminence because of its unique relationship with the Word of God. The sources, in a certain sense, can also be *ways* of catechesis.

THE WORD OF GOD IN SACRED SCRIPTURE AND IN SACRED TRADITION

91. Catechesis draws its message from the Word of God, which is its main source. Therefore, “it is essential that the revealed word radically enrich our catechesis and all our efforts to pass on the

faith."⁴³ Sacred Scripture, which God has inspired, reaches the depths of the human spirit better than any other word. The Word of God is not exhausted in Sacred Scripture, because it is a living, active and effective reality (cf. Is 55:10-11; Heb 4:12-13). God speaks and his Word is manifested in creation (cf. Gn 1:3 ff.; Ps 33:6, 9; Wis 9:1) and in history. In the last days, "he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:2). The only-Begotten of the Father is the definitive Word of God, who was in the beginning with God, was God, presided over creation (cf. Jn 1:1 ff.) being born of woman (cf. Gal 4:4) by the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35) in order to dwell among his own (cf. Jn 1:14). Returning to the Father (cf. Acts 1:9), he brings with him the creation that he redeemed, which was created in him and for him (cf. Col 1:18-20).

92. The Church lives her mission in expectation of the eschatological manifestation of the Lord. "This expectation is never passive; rather it is a missionary drive to proclaim the Word of God which heals and redeems every man. Today too the Risen Jesus says to us: 'Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation' (Mk 16:15)."⁴⁴ In fact, "faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Rom 10:17). Through preaching and catechesis, the Holy Spirit himself teaches, generating an encounter with the Word of God, living and effective (cf. Heb 4:12). In the course of Tradition, the thought and writings of the fathers of the Church have a significant role. As an expression of the ecclesial experience of the past and of the dynamic continuity that exists between the proclamation of the first disciples and our own,⁴⁵ it is well that the life and works of the Fathers should find a suitable place among the contents of catechesis.

⁴³ EG 175.

⁴⁴ Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010) 121.

⁴⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Speech to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization* (May 30, 2011).

THE MAGISTERIUM

93. Christ has given the Apostles and their successors the enduring mandate of proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth, promising them the assistance of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:20; Mk 16:15; Jn 20:21-22; Acts 1:8) who would make them teachers of humanity in relation to salvation, transmitting orally (Tradition) and in writing (sacred Scripture) the word of God. The Magisterium preserves, interprets, and transmits the deposit of faith, which is the content of Revelation. Fundamentally, the whole people of God is bound to guard and propagate the deposit of faith, it being the task of the entire Church to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. But the authority to teach the salvific message officially and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ belongs to the college of bishops. Therefore, the Roman pontiff and the bishops in communion with him are the custodians of the Magisterium of the Church. They have the primary responsibility of instructing the people of God in the contents of the Christian faith and morality, as well as of promoting its proclamation throughout the world (cf. LG 25).

94. Salvific truth remains in itself always the same and immutable. Nonetheless, over time the Church gets to know the deposit of revelation ever better. A homogeneous deepening and development therefore can be detected, in line with the word of God itself. The Magisterium thus renders service to the word and to the people of God by recalling the salvific truths of Christ, clarifying and applying them in the face of the new challenges of the various eras and situations, acting as a bridge between Scripture and Tradition. The Magisterium is an institution positively willed by Christ as an essential element of the Church. Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium are therefore closely connected with one another and none can exist without the others. Together they effectively contribute, each in its own way, to the salvation of humanity (cf. DV 10). Catechesis is, among other things, a mediation of the pronouncements of the Magisterium.

THE LITURGY

95. The liturgy is one of the essential and indispensable sources of the Church's catechesis, not only because catechesis is able to draw its contents, vocabulary, actions, and words of faith from the liturgy, but above all because the two belong to one another in the very act of believing. Although each has its own specificity, the liturgy and catechesis, understood in the light of the Church's tradition, are not to be juxtaposed but rather to be seen in the context of the Christian and ecclesial life as both being oriented toward bringing to life the experience of God's love. The ancient principle *lex credendi lex orandi* recalls, in fact, that the liturgy is an integral element of Tradition.

96. The liturgy is "the privileged place for catechizing the People of God."⁴⁶ This is not to be understood in the sense that the liturgy should lose its celebratory character and be turned into catechesis, or that catechesis is superfluous. Although it is correct that the two contributions should maintain their specificity, it must be recognized that the liturgy is the summit and source of the Christian life. Catechesis, in fact, is set in motion by a first effective encounter between the one being catechized and the community that celebrates the mystery, which is to say that catechesis reaches its true fulfillment when the one being catechized takes part in the liturgical life of the community. Catechesis therefore cannot be thought of merely as preparation for the sacraments, but must be understood in relationship to liturgical experience. "Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings."⁴⁷ Therefore, liturgy and catechesis are inseparable and nourish one another.

46 CCC 1074.

47 CT 23.

97. The Christian's formative journey, as attested to in the *mystagogical catecheses* of the Church Fathers, always had an experiential character, but never neglecting the understanding of the faith. The living and persuasive encounter with Christ proclaimed by authentic witnesses was critical. Therefore, one who introduces another to the mysteries is first of all a witness. This encounter finds its source and summit in the celebration of the Eucharist, and is deepened through catechesis.

98. The need for a mystagogical journey springs from this fundamental structure of Christian experience, from which three essential elements⁴⁸ emerge:

- a. the interpretation of the rites in the light of salvific events, in keeping with the Tradition of the Church, reinterpreting the mysteries of the life of Jesus and his Paschal mystery in particular relation to the entire course of the Old Testament;
- b. an introduction to the meaning of liturgical signs, so that mystagogic catechesis may reawaken and educate the sensibilities of the faithful in the language of the signs and actions that, together with the word, constitute the rite;
- c. the presentation of the meaning of the ceremonies in relation to the whole of the Christian life, in order to emphasize the liturgy's connection to the missionary responsibility of the faithful and to increase the awareness that the believers' existence is gradually transformed by the mysteries celebrated.

The mystagogic dimension of catechesis cannot however be reduced to the mere exploration of Christian initiation after the reception of the sacraments, but also includes incorporation into the Sunday liturgy and the feasts of the liturgical year with which the Church already nourishes catechumens and baptized children

48 Cf. Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (February 22, 2007), 64.

well before they can receive the Eucharist or begin organic and structured catechesis.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE SAINTS AND MARTYRS

99. From the very first centuries, the example of the Virgin Mary and the lives of the saints and martyrs have been an integral and efficacious part of catechesis: from the *acta martyrum* to the *passiones*, from frescoes and icons in churches to edifying stories for children and the illiterate. The testimonies of life and death for the Lord offered by the saints and martyrs have been authentic *sequentiae sancti Evangelii*, Gospel passages capable of proclaiming Christ and eliciting and nourishing faith in him.

100. The Church sees the martyrs as illustrious teachers of the faith, who with the labors and sufferings of their apostolate made possible the first expansion and formulation of that same faith. In the martyrs the Church finds her seed of life: "*semen est sanguis Christianorum*."⁴⁹ This law does not belong only to early Christianity, but is valid for the whole history of the Church up to our day. The twentieth century, which has been called the *century of martyrdom*, showed itself to be especially rich in witnesses who were willing to live the Gospel to the point of the supreme trial of love. Their testimony of faith must be safeguarded and transmitted in preaching and catechesis, nourishing the growth of the disciples of Christ. The apparitions of the Virgin Mary recognized by the Church, the lives and writings of the saints and martyrs of every culture and people are a true source of catechesis.

THEOLOGY

101. The fact that the Revelation of God surpasses humanity's capacity to understand it does not mean that it is opposed to human reason, but that it penetrates and elevates it. The believer's seeking

of an understanding of the faith—or theology—is therefore an indispensable necessity for the Church. "Theological work in the Church is first of all at the service of the proclamation of the faith and of catechesis."⁵⁰ It penetrates with critical intelligence the contents of the faith, exploring them and organizing them systematically with the contribution of reason. Christ, however, is not only to be explored in systematic reflection by reasoning alone, in that he is the living truth and "wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24), He is a presence that illuminates. The sapiential approach allows theology to integrate different aspects of the faith. Theology, moreover, "offers its contribution so that the faith might be communicated. Appealing to the understanding of those who do not yet know Christ, it helps them to seek and find faith."⁵¹ The science of theology makes its contribution to catechesis and to catechetical practice more in general through the different specializations that characterize it: fundamental theology, biblical theology, dogmatic theology, moral theology, spiritual theology, etc.; and in a more specific way with catechetics, pastoral theology, the theology of evangelization, the theology of education and communication.

CHRISTIAN CULTURE

102. Christian culture is born from the awareness of the centrality of Jesus Christ and of his Gospel, which transforms the life of humanity. By slowly permeating different cultures, the Christian faith has adopted, purified, and transformed them from within, making the evangelical style their essential feature, contributing to the creation of a new and original culture, the Christian culture, which over the course of the centuries has produced true masterpieces in all branches of knowledge. It has acted as a support and as a vehicle for the proclamation of the Gospel and, despite historical changes

50 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998), 99.

51 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the ecclesial vocation of the theologian*, *Donum Veritatis* (May 24, 1990) 7.

49 Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 50, 13: CCL 1, 171 (PL 1, 603).

sometimes marked by ideological and cultural conflicts, has succeeded in preserving genuine evangelical values such as, for example, the uniqueness of the human person, the dignity of life, freedom as a condition of human life, equality between men and women, the need to “refuse the evil and choose the good” (Is 7:15), the importance of compassion and solidarity, the significance of forgiveness and mercy and the necessity of being open to transcendence.

103. Over the course of the centuries, nonetheless, those societies shaped by Christian culture in particular have arrived at a cultural crisis resulting from an exaggerated secularism that has led to a false concept of autonomy. The only criteria accepted have been those based on social consensus or on subjective opinions, often in contrast with natural ethics. This “split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time.”⁵² It therefore becomes clear that a new understanding is needed of Christian culture, a culture of encounter, which has the ability to unify,⁵³ allowing the Gospel to unleash forces of true humanity, peace, and justice. These forces that are at the basis of Christian culture make the faith more comprehensible and desirable.

104. Christian culture has played a decisive role in the preservation of cultures that came before it and in the progress of international culture. It was capable, for example, of interpreting according to a new spirit the great achievements of Greek philosophy and Roman jurisprudence to make them the heritage of all humanity. It also shaped the perception of the good, the just, the true, and the beautiful, eliciting the creation of works—literary and scholarly texts, musical compositions, masterpieces of architecture and painting—that will remain as a witness to the contribution of the Christian faith and making up its intellectual, moral, and aesthetic heritage.

52 EN 20.

53 Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998), 85.

105. This heritage, of great historical and artistic value, is a resource that inspires and enhances catechesis, in that it transmits the Christian vision of the world with the creative power of beauty. Catechesis must avail itself of the Christian cultural heritage in its attempt to “[preserve] among men the faculties of contemplation and observation which lead to wisdom” (GS 56) and to educate believers, in a time of fragmentation, to the vision of the “whole human person in which the values of intellect, will, conscience and fraternity are pre-eminent. These values are all rooted in God the Creator and have been wonderfully restored and elevated in Christ” (GS 61). The enormous Christian cultural heritage, presented according to the thinking of its creators, can effectively mediate the internalization of the central elements of the evangelical message.

BEAUTY

106. Sacred Scripture presents, in an unmistakable way, God as the source of all splendor and beauty. The Old Testament shows creation, with humanity at its pinnacle, as something that is good and beautiful, not so much in the sense of order and harmony but of gratuitousness, free of functionalism. In the presence of creation, which is to be admired and contemplated for its own sake, one feels amazement, ecstasy, an emotional and affective reaction. The works of human beings, like the splendid Temple of Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs 7-8), deserve admiration in that they are connected to the Creator.

107. In the New Testament, all beauty is concentrated in the person of Jesus Christ, revealer of the divine who “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature” (Heb 1:3). His Gospel is captivating because it is news that is beautiful, good, joyful, full of hope. He, “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14), taking humanity upon himself, recounted through the parables the beauty of God’s activity. In his relationship with men and women he spoke *beautiful*

words that with their efficacy heal the depths of the soul: “Your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5), “Neither do I condemn you” (Jn 8:11), “God so loved the world” (Jn 3:16), “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). He performed *beautiful actions*: he healed, he set free, he accompanied humanity and touched its wounds. Enduring the cruelty of condemnation to death as the one who “had no form or comeliness” (Is 53:2), he was recognized as “the fairest of the sons of men” (Ps 45:2). In this way he led humanity, purified, into the glory of the Father, where he himself is found “at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” (Heb 1:3) and has thus revealed all the transformative power of his Passover.

108. The Church, therefore, bears in mind that in order to reach the human heart the proclamation of the Risen One must shine forth with goodness, truth, and beauty. In this sense, it is necessary “that every form of catechesis [. . .] attend to the ‘way of beauty’ (*via pulchritudinis*).”⁵⁴ All beauty can be a path that helps lead to the encounter with God, but the criterion of its authenticity cannot be only that of aesthetics. There must be discernment between true beauty and the forms that are apparently beautiful but empty, or even harmful, like the forbidden fruit in the earthly paradise (cf. Gn 3:6). The criteria are found in the exhortation of St. Paul: “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8).

109. Beauty is always and inseparably steeped with goodness and truth. Therefore, contemplating beauty elicits within us sentiments of joy, pleasure, tenderness, fullness, meaning, thus opening us to the transcendent. The way of evangelization is the *way of beauty*,

and therefore every form of beauty is a source of catechesis. In demonstrating the primacy of grace, manifest in a special way in the Blessed Virgin Mary; in making known the lives of the saints as true witnesses to the beauty of the faith; in giving prominence to the beauty and mysteriousness of creation; in discovering and cherishing the incredible and immense liturgical and artistic heritage of the Church; in valuing the highest forms of contemporary art, catechesis shows concretely the infinite beauty of God, which is also expressed in the works of human beings (cf. SC 122), and leads those who are catechized toward the *beautiful* gift that the Father has made in his Son.

⁵⁴ EG 167; cf. Pontifical Council for Culture, *The Via Pulchritudinis, Privileged Pathway for Evangelization and Dialogue: Concluding Document of the Plenary Assembly*, 2006.