

God's grace that moves and assists the individual to believe. It is the interior help of the Holy Spirit that moves the heart and converts it to God.¹⁰⁵ The faith *which* one believes is also God's gift. It consists of the content of Divine Revelation. Faith, then, is the human response to a personal God, who has revealed himself, and to the Truth that God has revealed through the Catholic Church.

17. EVANGELIZATION AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

A. The New Evangelization

Pope John Paul II has summoned the Church to undertake the new evangelization of the world and has invited peoples everywhere to open wide the doors to Christ. "I sense," he said, "that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*."¹⁰⁶ No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.¹⁰⁷ The Good News of Jesus Christ must be carried forth to every person and every nation so that it may penetrate the heart of every person and renew the human race. We carry forward this task of proclaiming the Gospel with our fellow Christians, where possible. Such common witness is an integral dimension of our mission to evangelize.¹⁰⁸ An ardent longing to invite others to encounter Jesus is the spark that starts the evangelizing mission to which the whole Church is called. The Church can spare no effort in leading all humanity to Christ because in Christ all humanity discovers the deepest truths about itself.

To evangelize individuals is not sufficient. The Gospel is intended for every people and nation; it finds a home in every culture. Those who proclaim the Christian message must know and love the culture and the people to whom they bring the message in order for it to be able to transform the culture and the people and make them new in Christ. "The new

evangelization calls for a clearly conceived, serious and well organized effort to evangelize culture."¹⁰⁹ The dynamism inherent in the new evangelization demands both the inculturation of the Gospel and the transformation of the culture by the Gospel.

In summary, the new evangelization is primarily the "clear and unequivocal proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ, that is, the preaching of his name, his teaching, his life, his promises and the Kingdom which he has gained for us by his Paschal Mystery."¹¹⁰ It involves the active participation of every Christian in the proclamation and demonstration that the Christian faith is the only fully valid response to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society.¹¹¹ The new evangelization is directed to the Church herself: to the baptized who were never effectively evangelized before, to those who have never made a personal commitment to Christ and the Gospel, to those formed by the values of the secularized culture, to those who have lost a sense of faith, and to those who are alienated. It is also directed to all human cultures so that they might be open to the Gospel and live in harmony with Christian values.¹¹² The new evangelization is aimed at personal transformation through the development of a personal relationship with God, participation in sacramental worship, the development of a mature ethical and social conscience, ongoing catechesis, and a deepening integration of faith into all areas of life.

The purpose of this evangelization is to bring about faith and conversion to Christ. Faith involves a profound change of mind and heart, a change of life, a "*metanoia*."¹¹³ Such a change can only arise from deep within the interior of one's being, where one faces the truly important questions about human life. Such a change, engendered by the action of the Holy Spirit, shows itself in the transformation of one's life. One begins to live "in Christ" and is able to confess with St. Paul, "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."¹¹⁴

109 EA, no. 70.

110 EA, no. 66.

111 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *The Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World* (Christifideles Laici) (CL) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1988), no. 34.

112 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Opening Address at Santo Domingo, 1992*, no. 22.

113 EN, no. 10.

114 Gal 2:20.

105 Cf. DV, no. 5.

106 "Ad gentes" means "to the nations," meaning that this mission is to everyone in the world.

107 RM, no. 3.

108 Cf. John Paul II, *That They All May Be One (Ut Unum Sint)* (UUS) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1995), nos. 89-90:109

B. Conversion

"The Christian faith is, above all, conversion to Jesus Christ."¹¹⁵ It is the fruit of God's grace and the free response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It arises from the depths of the human person and involves such a profound transformation of heart and mind that it causes the believer to change radically both internally and externally. The Blessed Virgin Mary's perfect response to the grace of the Holy Spirit represents the primordial conversion to Christ and the "purest realization of faith."¹¹⁶

For the Christian, this *metanoia* reorients all aspects of the person's life to Christ. This conversion is the acceptance of a personal relationship with Christ, a sincere adherence to him, and a willingness to conform one's life to his. Conversion to Christ involves making a genuine commitment to him and a personal decision to follow him as his disciple. Through this discipleship the believer is united to the community of disciples and appropriates the faith of the Church. The faith of the Church "is a gift destined to grow in the hearts of believers."¹¹⁷

The process of conversion involves understanding who Christ is in order to change and follow him more closely. Conversion begins with an openness to the initial proclamation of the Gospel and a sincere desire to listen for its resonance within. This search arouses in those coming to Christ a desire to know him more personally and to know more about him. This knowledge of the person, message, and mission of Christ enables the believer to "make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith."¹¹⁸ This profession of faith forms the foundation for the continuing journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is nourished by the sacraments, prayer, and the practice of charity "until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God . . . to the extent of the full stature of Christ."¹¹⁹ "This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted! We must let the Holy Spirit change our lives! We must respond to Jesus Christ."¹²⁰

115 GDC, no. 53; Cf. Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999), no. 16, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/christuni/documents/rc_pc_christuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html (accessed on August 29, 2003).

116 CCC, no. 149.

117 GDC, no. 56.

118 GDC, no. 82.

119 Eph 4:13.

120 USCCB, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (Temple Anniversary Ed.) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 2002), no. 14.

C. The Process of Evangelization

The Church's evangelizing activity consists of several essential elements: proclaiming Christ, preaching Christ, bearing witness to Christ, teaching Christ, and celebrating Christ's sacraments.¹²¹

Evangelization aims at both the interior change of individuals and the external change of societies. It is the totality of the Church's efforts to bring "the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new."¹²² The essential elements of evangelization are distributed throughout a complex process of stages or moments.¹²³ These stages include the following: missionary activity directed toward non-believers or those who live in religious indifference, the initial proclamation of the Gospel, initial catechetical activity for those who choose the Gospel or need to complete or modify their initiation, and pastoral activity directed toward those of mature Christian faith.¹²⁴

The ministry of the word is a fundamental element of evangelization through all its stages because it involves the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God. "There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the Kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are not proclaimed."¹²⁵

The word of God nourishes both evangelizers and those who are being evangelized so that each one may continue to grow in his or her Christian life. From apostolic times the Church has exercised the ministry of the word in a variety of forms and functions that are closely linked in practice. First, the listeners are prepared for the first proclamation of the Gospel, or *pre-evangelization*. Pre-evangelization ordinarily builds on basic human needs, such as security, love, or acceptance, and shows how those basic human needs include a desire for God and his word.

Then comes the initial announcement of the Gospel, or *missionary preaching*. This form of the ministry of the word is directed toward non-believers, those who have chosen not to believe, those who follow other religions, and the children of Christians. In our age it may also be addressed to those who may have been baptized but have little or no awareness of their Baptism and who consequently live on the margins of Christian life.

121 Cf. EN, no. 17.

122 EN, no. 18.

123 Cf. CT, no. 18.

124 Cf. AG, no. 6.

125 EN, no. 22.

Initiatory catechesis follows for catechumens, those who are coming to the Catholic faith from another Christian tradition, Catholics who need to complete their initiation, children, and the young. The function of initiatory catechesis is to introduce the life of faith, the Liturgy, and the charity of the People of God to those being initiated.¹²⁶

Mystagogical or *post-baptismal catechesis* is the form of the ministry of the word in which the implications for living a sacramental life are drawn out. The function of mystagogical catechesis is to lead the baptized deeper into the Christian life, celebration of the sacraments, prayer life of the Church, and her missionary activity.

Permanent or *continuing catechesis* involves the systematic presentation of the truths of the faith and the practice of Christian living. The function of permanent catechesis is to nourish the faith of believers throughout their lives.

While all Liturgy has a catechetical dimension, liturgical catechesis is most explicit in the form of the homily received during the celebration of the sacraments. As such, liturgical catechesis within the context of a sacred action is an integral part of that action.¹²⁷ Its function is “the immediate preparation for reception of the different sacraments, the celebration of sacraments and above all of the participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, as a primary means of education in the faith.”¹²⁸ Liturgical catechesis also includes reflection upon the ritual celebration.

Theological catechesis is the “systematic treatment and the scientific investigation of the truths of faith.”¹²⁹ It has a distinctly theological function: namely, to help Christians understand the faith by engaging in a dialogue with “philosophical forms of thought, various forms of humanism, and the human sciences.”¹³⁰

D. The Context of Evangelization

Evangelization in the United States occurs within diverse and rapidly changing social, religious, and cultural contexts. Some have never

126 Cf. AG, no. 14.

127 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* (SC), no. 35.

128 GDC, no. 51.

129 Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), no. 17, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc_con_cclergy_doc_11041971_geat_en.html (accessed on March 15, 2005).

130 GDC, no. 51.

encountered Christ and have never been baptized. They are in need of the initial announcement of the Gospel and the first call to conversion. Some have been baptized but were never formed in the faith after their childhood. Some have lost their faith, have drifted away from the Church because of one issue or another, and now live their lives at a considerable distance from Christ and the Gospel. Some feel alienated from the Church because of the way they perceive the Church or her teaching. Although many of them may say they are Catholic, they no longer worship with the community; and thereby they deprive themselves of the gifts of God’s Word and the sacraments of the Church.¹³¹ An enthusiastic re-evangelization or new evangelization and a basic catechesis are needed. On the other hand, some of the baptized remain fervent in their faith and vibrant in their Christian living. They know Christ and his Gospel and have committed themselves to the Church’s universal mission. A permanent catechesis centered around continual conversion “makes evangelizers of those who have been evangelized.”¹³²

These diverse and rapidly changing social, religious, and cultural contexts and the Church’s evangelical and catechetical responses to them coexist in the same communities in many parts of the United States. The boundaries between and among the diverse social, religious, and cultural contexts are not clearly definable. In addition, the initial announcement of the Gospel and a basic catechesis, the new evangelization and an initiatory catechesis, and a more permanent catechesis are stages not entirely distinct from one another as dimensions of the Church’s mission of evangelization. Catechesis in the United States receives from evangelization a missionary dynamic that encourages us to continue to evangelize the culture, affirming what is compatible and challenging what is not.

E. Pastoral Directives for Evangelization

In light of the social, cultural, and religious context of life in the United States, it is possible to suggest several pastoral directives to revitalize the Church’s response to Pope John Paul II’s call for a new evangelization. Dioceses and parishes are encouraged to study, reflect on, and adopt the goals of *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic*

131 Cf. *Go and Make Disciples*, no. 39.

132 GDC, no. 58.

Evangelization in the United States and integrate them into their respective missions. All dioceses and parishes, in the efforts and resources they focus on the new evangelization, should pursue the following fundamental objectives:

1. To foster in the heart of every believer an experience of personal conversion to Jesus Christ that leads to a personal renewal and greater participation in the Christian life in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ
2. To encourage a greater knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and Sacred Tradition of the Church
3. To focus their efforts and resources on the conversion and renewal of every parish, especially through the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
4. To rededicate themselves to a liturgical renewal that develops a greater appreciation for the presence and power of Christ in the word of God and the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, and a stronger commitment to celebrating the Eucharist each Sunday
5. To make the evangelical and social justice dimensions of the Sunday Eucharist more explicit
6. To call their people to a more effective integration of daily prayer in their lives, especially the ancient practice of praying the Psalms and the Church's Liturgy of the Hours, contemplation of the mysteries of the life of Christ through the Rosary, and a greater reverence of the Eucharist through adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
7. To ensure that all Catholic institutions, especially parishes, are accessible and welcoming to all

(Other pastoral directives related to particular aspects of evangelization and catechesis will be outlined in subsequent chapters.)

These pastoral directives for evangelization give catechesis in the United States a missionary dynamic that encourages us to continue to evangelize the culture, affirming what is compatible and challenging what is not:

Seeing both the ideals and the faults of our nation, we Catholics need to recognize how much our Catholic faith, for all it has received from American culture, still has to offer to our nation.

On the level of truth, we have a profound and consistent moral teaching based on the dignity and destiny of every person created by God. On the practical level, we have the witness of American Catholics serving those most in need, educationally, socially, materially, and spiritually.¹³³

The ministry of catechesis, as an essential moment in the Church's mission of evangelization,¹³⁴ is a fundamental ecclesial service for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus here in the United States.

18. SOURCE AND SOURCES OF CATECHESIS

The source of catechesis is found in the word of God revealed by Jesus Christ. "Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures, for 'sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church.'¹³⁵ Together they make the mystery of Christ present and fruitful in the Church.

Sacred Scripture "is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit."¹³⁶ Sacred Tradition "transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching."¹³⁷

To refer to the word of God in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition as the principal source of catechesis means, on the one hand, that catechesis must be primarily based on the thought, spirit, and perspective of the Old and New Testaments. On the other, it means that the biblical texts from which catechesis proceeds must be read from within the Church's two-thousand-year experience of faith and life.

The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit in every age, must interpret the word of God. The Church performs this function authoritatively through

133 *Go and Make Disciples*, no. 59.

134 GDC, no. 63, citing CT, no. 18.

135 CT, no. 27.

136 DV, no. 9.

137 DV, no. 9.

her living, teaching office, the Magisterium. The Magisterium ensures the Church's fidelity to the teaching of the apostles in matters of faith and morals. "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ."¹³⁸ The Magisterium is the servant of the word of God. "It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith."¹³⁹ Thus, the word of God, contained and transmitted in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and interpreted by the Magisterium, is the principal source of catechesis.

Catechesis has secondary sources as well. Catechesis is nourished when the word of God is more deeply understood and developed by the people exercising their faith under the guidance of the Magisterium. It is enlivened in the celebration of the Liturgy. Catechesis draws on theology as it seeks the fuller understanding of the Gospel message. Catechesis is enriched when the word of God shines forth in the life of the Church, especially in the lives of the saints and in the Christian witness of the faithful. And it is made more fruitful when the word of God is known from those genuine moral values that, by divine providence, are found in human society.

19. NATURE AND PURPOSE OF CATECHESIS: INITIATORY AND ONGOING

A. Nature and Purpose of Catechesis

"Catechesis is that particular form of the ministry of the word which matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith."¹⁴⁰

Catechesis aims to bring about in the believer an ever more mature faith in Jesus Christ, a deeper knowledge and love of his person and message, and a firm commitment to follow him. In many situations, however,

¹³⁸ DV, no. 10.

¹³⁹ DV, no. 10.

¹⁴⁰ GDC, no. 82.

catechesis must also be concerned with arousing initial faith and sustaining the gradual conversion to complete adherence to Jesus Christ for those who are on the threshold of faith. With God's grace, catechesis develops initial faith, nourishes the Christian life, and continually unfolds the mystery of Christ until the believer willingly becomes his disciple.

To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know his "mystery," the Kingdom of God proclaimed by him, the requirements and promises contained in his Gospel message, and the paths that he has laid down for any one who wishes to follow him.¹⁴¹

B. The Object of Catechesis

The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him, and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him. "At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, 'the only Son from the Father . . . full of grace and truth,'¹⁴² who suffered and died for us and who now after rising, is living with us forever."¹⁴³ For in Christ the whole of God's eternal plan is revealed, a plan that begins with the Father's generation of his only Son and reaches its fulfillment in him. Christ is the living center of catechesis, who draws all persons to his Father through the Holy Spirit. "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."¹⁴⁴ St. Paul declared, "For to me life is Christ."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ CT, no. 20.

¹⁴² Jn 1:14.

¹⁴³ CT, no. 5.

¹⁴⁴ CT, no. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Phil 1:21.

Jesus Christ himself is always the first and last point of reference in catechesis because he is “the way and the truth and the life.”¹⁴⁶

C. Catechesis and the Church

“Catechesis is an essentially ecclesial act”—an action of the Church:

The true subject of catechesis is the Church which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master and, therefore animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of the faith. The Church imitates the Mother of the Lord in treasuring the Gospel in her heart. She proclaims it, celebrates it, lives it, and she transmits it in catechesis to all those who have decided to follow Jesus Christ. This transmission of the Gospel is a living act of ecclesial tradition.¹⁴⁷

Thus, catechesis is a pivotal dimension of the Church’s pastoral activity and a significant element in all the Church does to hand on the faith. Every means that the Church employs in her overall mission to go and make disciples has a catechetical aspect. Catechesis gives form to the missionary preaching that is intended to arouse the first signs of faith. It shapes the initial proclamation of the Gospel. Catechesis assists the early examination of reasons for belief. It communicates the essential elements in the experience of Christian living. It prepares for the celebration of the sacraments. It facilitates integration into the ecclesial community. It urges apostolic activity and missionary witness. It instills a zeal for the unity of Christians and prepares one for the ecumenical understanding and mission of the Church. “Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church’s life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God’s plan depend essentially on catechesis.”¹⁴⁸

The Church is the historical realization of God’s gift of communion in Christ. As such she is the origin, *locus*, and goal of catechesis. Catechesis springs from the Church. “The profession of faith received by the Church (*traditio*), which germinates and grows during the catechetical process, is

given back (*reddito*), enriched by the values of different cultures.”¹⁴⁹ The Church depends on an effective catechesis to be faithful to Christ’s command to proclaim the Gospel. “The Christian community is in herself living catechesis.”¹⁵⁰

The Church is a natural environment for catechesis. She provides the primary setting for the proclamation of the Gospel, the point of welcome for those who seek to know the Lord, the place where men and women are invited to conversion and discipleship, the environment for the celebration of the sacraments, and the motivation for apostolic witness in the world.

The Church is also the goal of catechesis. Catechesis aims to build up the Body of Christ, the Church. “The more the Church, whether on the local or the universal level, gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings the results of which would be more spectacular, the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church.”¹⁵¹

D. Initiatory Catechesis

Within the Church’s mission of evangelization, catechesis promotes and matures initial conversion, educates persons in the faith, and incorporates them into the life of the Christian community. Today, however, catechesis must often take the form of the primary proclamation of the Gospel because many who present themselves for catechesis have not yet experienced conversion to Jesus Christ. Some level of conversion is necessary, however, if catechesis is to be able to fulfill its proper task of education in the faith.¹⁵²

In some situations initial catechesis precedes Baptism, while in others it follows Baptism; but in all situations, catechesis serves initiation. In seeking to foster the initial faith of the catechumen in the person of Jesus Christ, catechesis leads to a genuine profession of faith. This profession of faith is the goal of catechesis and an inherent element in the sacraments of initiation. It forms the link between the catechesis and the sacraments

149 GDC, no. 78.

150 GDC, no. 141.

151 CT, no. 15.

152 Cf. International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) and USCCB Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) (Washington, D.C.: USCCB, 1988), no. 9.

146 In 14:6.

147 GDC, no. 78.

148 CT, no. 13.

of initiation, especially Baptism. The aim of catechetical activity is to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith.¹⁵³

Initiatory catechesis “should be of a kind that while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ.”¹⁵⁴ Such initiatory catechesis is a

comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith [that] . . . includes more than instruction: it is an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life, it is a ‘complete Christian initiation,’ which promotes an authentic following of Christ, focused on his Person; it implies education in knowledge of the faith and in the life of faith, in such a manner that the entire person, at his deepest levels, feels enriched by the word of God.¹⁵⁵

It is “a basic and essential formation, centered on what constitutes the nucleus of Christian experience, the most fundamental certainties of the faith and the most essential evangelical values.”¹⁵⁶ Initiatory catechesis cultivates the roots of faith, nurtures a distinctively Christian spiritual life, and prepares the person to be nourished at the table of the Eucharist and in the ordinary life of the Christian community.

Initiatory catechesis incorporates those preparing for the sacraments of initiation into the Christian community that knows, lives, celebrates, and bears witness to the faith. The richness of this initiatory catechesis should serve to inspire other forms of catechesis.¹⁵⁷

E. Ongoing Catechesis

Catechesis for those who have received the sacraments of initiation goes beyond that which was provided by initiatory catechesis. It serves the continuing conversion and ongoing formation of those who have been

153 Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church (Christus Dominus)* (CD), no. 14.

154 RCJA, no. 78.

155 GDC, no. 67.

156 GDC, no. 67.

157 GDC, no. 68.

initiated into the faith. Such continuing conversion and ongoing formation are the responsibility of the whole Catholic community and occur most fruitfully within the community. Ongoing catechesis fosters the growth of a more mature faith in the members of the community. It aims to make each person’s faith “living, explicit and active, . . . enlightened by doctrine.”¹⁵⁸ While catechesis seeks to enrich the faith life of people at every stage of their development, every form of catechesis is oriented in some way to the catechesis of adults who are capable of a full response to God’s word.¹⁵⁹ Ongoing catechesis is “a lifelong process for the individual and a constant and concerted pastoral activity of the Christian community.”¹⁶⁰ The most effective forms of this lifelong catechesis involve the study and praying of Sacred Scripture, a systematic catechesis that gradually leads people deeper into their relationship with Jesus because they grow in their understanding of who he is and what he has done for us, liturgical and sacramental catechesis, initiatives of spiritual formation, and thorough examination of the Church’s social teachings.

20. TASKS OF CATECHESIS

Jesus formed his disciples by making known to them the various dimensions of the Kingdom of God. He entrusted to them “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven”;¹⁶¹ he taught them how to pray;¹⁶² he opened his “meek and humble heart” to them;¹⁶³ and he sent them “ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit.”¹⁶⁴ The fundamental task of catechesis is to achieve this same objective: the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus instructed his disciples; he prayed with them; he showed them how to live; and he gave them his mission.

Christ’s method of formation was accomplished by diverse yet inter-related tasks. His example is the most fruitful inspiration for effective catechesis today because it is integral to formation in the Christian faith. Catechesis must attend to each of these different dimensions of faith;

158 CD, no. 14.

159 Cf. *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 20.

160 *National Catechetical Directory*, no. 32.

161 Mt 13:11.

162 Cf. Lk 11:2.

163 Mt 11:29.

164 Lk 10:1.

each becomes a distinct yet complementary task. Faith must be known, celebrated, lived, and expressed in prayer. So catechesis comprises six fundamental tasks, each of which is related to an aspect of faith in Christ. All efforts in evangelization and catechesis should incorporate these tasks.

1. *Catechesis promotes knowledge of the faith.* The initial proclamation of the Gospel introduces the hearers to Christ for the first time and invites conversion to him. By the action of the Holy Spirit, such an encounter engenders in the hearers a desire to know about Christ, his life, and the content of his message. Catechesis responds to this desire by giving the believers a knowledge of the content of God's self-revelation, which is found in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and by introducing them to the meaning of the Creed. Creeds and doctrinal formulas that state the Church's belief are expressions of the Church's living tradition, which from the time of the apostles has developed "in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit."¹⁶⁵
2. *Catechesis promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments.* Since Christ is present in the sacraments,¹⁶⁶ the believer comes to know Christ in the liturgical celebrations of the Church and is drawn into communion with him. Christ's saving action in the Paschal Mystery is celebrated in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, where the closest communion with Jesus on earth is possible as Catholics are able to receive his living Flesh and his Precious Blood in Holy Communion. Catechesis should promote "an active, conscious genuine participation in the liturgy of the Church, not merely by explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, but also by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for a community spirit, and for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds."¹⁶⁷ Sacramental catechesis prepares for the initial celebration of the sacraments and provides enrichment following their reception.

165 DV, no. 8.

166 Cf. SC, no. 7.

167 *General Catechetical Directory*, no. 23.

3. *Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ.* Jesus' moral teaching is an integral part of his message. Catechesis must transmit both the content of Christ's moral teachings as well as their implications for Christian living. Moral catechesis aims to conform the believer to Christ—to bring about personal transformation and conversion. It should encourage the faithful to give witness—both in their private lives and in the public arena—to Christ's teaching in everyday life. Such testimony demonstrates the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel.¹⁶⁸
4. *Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ.* Conversion to Christ and communion with him lead the faithful to adopt his disposition of prayer and reflection. Jesus' entire life, death, and Resurrection were an offering to his Father. His prayer was always directed toward his Father. Catechesis should invite the believer to join Christ in the Our Father. Prayer should be the ordinary environment for all catechesis so that the knowledge and practice of the Christian life may be understood and celebrated in its proper context.
5. *Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.* Jesus said to his disciples, "Love one another. As I have loved you. . . ."¹⁶⁹ This command provides the basis for the disciples' life in community. Catechesis encourages an apprenticeship in Christian living that is based on Christ's teachings about community life. It should encourage a spirit of simplicity and humility, a special concern for the poor, particular care for the alienated, a sense of fraternal correction, common prayer, mutual forgiveness, and a fraternal love that embraces all these attitudes. Catechesis encourages the disciples of Jesus to make their daily conduct a shining and convincing testimony to the Gospel.¹⁷⁰ "He also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, 'the manifestation

168 Cf. CT, nos. 29ff.

169 Jn 13:34.

170 Cf. CL, nos. 34, 51.