

TODAY'S CATECHETICS

On September 25, 1982, the Catechetical Office sponsored a Scripture Workshop for priests, laity and religious. The purpose of the workshop was to provide for those engaged in Catechetics a day of reflection on the scriptures and the teaching ministry. The speaker was Rev. Eugene Laverdiere, S.S.S., noted scripture scholar, author and teacher. There were 150 participants.

In brief, Fr. Laverdiere's lectures emphasized the New Testament understanding of catechesis as something that is understood "only by engaging in it." Fr. Laverdiere made us aware that as obvious as it may seem, many of us do not view our teaching as a ministry. He said that the most basic attitude of Jesus, *the Teacher*, was His willingness to lay down His life for His students (disciples), and it was this attitude that "gave power to the teaching."

Scripture studies and the work of renewing both Catechetics and liturgy have been ongoing since the turn of the century. Because of the varied circumstances and wide-range needs, Catechetics has taken various forms. Basically, however, Catechesis has two aims. The first is to hand on the faith (Tradition), and then to allow for a free response. Both evangelization and catechesis are in the forefront of the Church's mission in our age.

It is important to note that Vatican II stressed in the conciliar documents the interrelatedness of liturgy and catechesis. The Council stated in particular that sacred theology "rests upon the written work of God." Teaching sacred scripture in the light of faith, is a ministry which "includes pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all other Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should have an exceptional place." (DV #24")

This intimate relationship between liturgy and catechesis does not mean that liturgy be used as a teaching tool for information, or that catechesis itself is a homily. It does mean that "both are rooted in the Church's faith, and both strengthen faith and summon Christians to conversion, although they do so in different ways..." (NCD,...#113)

Catechesis: "the infallible sign of the life of the Church and an inexhaustible source of her vitality."

Conversion, both permanent and on-going, is the key to our present day understanding of Catechetics. Vatican II, particularly concerned with prayer life as the basis of renewal, also paved the way for a renewal of the ancient Catechumenate. The point being, that the Church has once again put before us the significance of the communal bond (the Trinity, exemplar of all communal bonds) for worship, evangelization and catechesis.

Following this, the new code of Canon Law also clearly states the awesome ministry of the parish priest in carrying out for the faith-filled community "the duties of teaching, sanctifying,

and ruling" (Can 458). In speaking specifically of the ministry of the Divine Word, the code states that special concern is to be given to "preaching and catechetical formation which always holds the primary place." (Can 716).

In considering the question of Catechetics today, we cannot discuss it apart from its context in the total life of the Church and society at large. It can be said however, that effective catechesis thrives in a friendly environment, where common faith is shared, and deeper relationships are fostered.

It is from this vantage point that the renewed order of the Catechumenate, in the form of the RCIA, is emerging as the model for Catechetics and parish renewal. Youth Ministry itself, an effective catechesis for adolescents, takes its inspiration from this 'relational' model. The first essential aspect of the RCIA is that it understands Christian as a process which occurs over a period of time. The length of time being determined by the progress of the person since it is the maturation of a life of faith, and not the induction of an individual into an organization.

What the Rite brings out so powerfully, is that this initiation can only really take place in a community which is ready to give of itself. The Catechumenate is a mutual task on the part of the individual and the community. Catechesis, in the light of this, can be understood as reflection on and articulation of experience, as well as, organized catechetical instructions and formative exercises in prayer and Christian love. The RCIA best exemplifies a process and a movement towards the love of God and the love of one's neighbor (community).

Saint Pope John Paul II in his exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* says "The primary and essential object of catechesis is...the mystery of Christ. Catechizing is a way to lead a person to study this mystery..." Catechesis is a key moment in Evangelization: "the infallible sign of the life of the Church and an inexhaustible source of her vitality."

With these inspiring thoughts in mind, it is up to all of us to encourage and motivate, and to train catechists on every level (NCD #218). We must strive to promote an evangelizing catechesis, one which embraces total Christian formation, through effectiveness in programs, family-oriented catechesis, and by communicating the Church's social teaching.

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Mario Marzocchi, S.S.S., Director, Catechetical Office