



EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON THEMES FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS

*"Catechesis is nothing other than the process of transmitting the Gospel, as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways."
(GDC, #105)*

*"The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ."
(CT5) All evangelizing activity is understood as promoting communion with Jesus Christ."
(GDC, #80)*

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CATECHETICAL LEADERSHIP

Opening Prayer

Take a moment to place yourself in the presence of God's Spirit, then prayerfully read and reflect on the following passage:

*"In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you are to pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.' If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."
(Matthew 6: 7-15)*

Article 11

Catechesis and Liturgy

by Jacquelyne M. Witter

(Based on paragraphs #30, 84-87, 122, and 207-208 of the *General Directory for Catechesis*)

Preparing to Read

In preparing to read this article, please reflect on and discuss with others the following:

1. How do you see catechesis and liturgy as related to each other?
2. How have you experienced this relationship?

Introduction

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of two disciples on the first Easter who are joined by a stranger as they walk to Emmaus. As this stranger listens to them and talks with them about their recent experiences, he breaks open the Scriptures for them. Later he joins them for a meal at which he takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to those assembled around the table. With this, their eyes are opened so that they recognize the stranger for who he is: the Lord. The disciples return to Jerusalem to announce what they witnessed and to tell how they came to recognize the Lord in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:13-35).

This Gospel story provides insights into the close relationship between catechesis and liturgy: The disciples who have been initiated into faith are led to deeper faith and to praise and thanksgiving as they:

- recount and reflect on their experiences;
- encounter the Risen Lord;
- are helped to explore the meaning of the scriptures;
- gather around the table for the blessing, breaking, and sharing of the bread;
- profess their faith in the Risen Lord;
- go forth to tell others what they have come to know and understand. (*General Directory for Catechesis [GDC]*, #53-54)

It would be difficult to overestimate the important relationship between catechesis and liturgy (#122). Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *On Catechesis in Our Time (Catechesi Tradendae [CT])* notes their intimate connection: "Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action" (#23). Catechesis, "a school of faith, an initiation and apprenticeship in the entire Christian life" (*GDC*, #30), flows from and leads to liturgy, "the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium [SC])*, #2). The great works of proclaiming the Gospel

and converting to a life in Christ accomplished through evangelization and catechesis are essential precursors to liturgy: "Before people can come to liturgy they must be called to faith and conversion . . ." (*SC*, #9).

The Nature of Liturgy

The word "liturgy" comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which means "work of the people." It originally referred to public works of service done for the good of the people, such as the building of a bridge. As time went on, it also came to refer to religious service. By the end of the apostolic period, it was used to describe service of God and service of the community. Gradually, the Church adopted the word to describe all of Christian worship. Today the word refers to the official public worship of the Church. Specifically, liturgy includes Mass, the sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours (the daily prayer of the Church), rites of installation and ordination for service in the Church, and occasional liturgies such as religious profession or the dedication of a church. The Church, the Body of Christ, joins Christ in prayer and worship in liturgy (*SC*, #7).

Liturgy celebrates the central mystery of our faith: the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As *SC* states:

As Christ was sent by the Father, he himself also sent the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit. *Their mission was, first, by preaching the Gospel to every creature, to proclaim that by his death and resurrection Christ has freed us from Satan's grip and brought us into the Father's kingdom. By the work they preached they were also to bring into effect through the sacrifice and the sacraments, the center of the whole liturgical life.* (emphasis added) (*SC*, #6)

Theological Foundations of Liturgy

In liturgy the Church expresses its fundamental beliefs whose sources are Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium (*GDC*, #96).

From the General Directory for Catechesis

Christ is always present in his Church, especially in "liturgical celebrations" (*CSL* 7).

Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. The Church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy (see *CSL* 14) and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. For this reason, catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ "for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds . . .," (*DCG* (1971) 25b) as all this is necessary for a true liturgical life. (*GDC*, #85)



Liturgy is Trinitarian. Christians are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This fundamental belief in three persons in one God is clearly expressed in Baptism and in all aspects of liturgy. The Church always prays to the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit (*GDC*, #82; *SC*, #6).

Liturgy is Christ-centered (*GDC*, #98; *SC*, #7). The Church is the Body of Christ called to continue Christ's saving work. The Church participates in the saving work of Christ in and through the liturgy by which it is empowered to fulfill its mission:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Liturgy is the Church's response to God's initiative. From the time of creation, God has reached out to human beings to make God's love and presence known. In the fullness of time, God became human in Jesus Christ to bring salvation to all humankind. God's saving work for us in redemption is a gift from God freely given to us in and through Christ. In liturgy, the Church responds with praise and thanksgiving to God's ongoing gift of salvation (*GDC*, #101; *SC*, #5).

Liturgy is an action of the Church as Church (*GDC*, #105-106; *SC*, #26). The Church is the community of the baptized. Liturgy is the prayer of this *ecclesia*, the *assembly gathered around the Lord*. Liturgy is not private, personal prayer or public group prayer. It is *ecclesial* prayer.

Liturgy is incarnational and ritual prayer (*GDC*, #207; *SC*, #61). God is present and acts in creation and human life, most significantly in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Liturgy involves words, actions, and symbols that engage the whole person.

Liturgy sanctifies human beings and human life. The liturgy recalls and makes present salvation history in Word and sacrament. The daily, weekly, and yearly rhythms of the prayer of the Church consecrate human beings in the daily, weekly, and yearly rhythms of life (*GDC*, #117; *SC*, #102).

Catechesis and Liturgy

One of the fundamental tasks of catechesis is liturgical education. Liturgical education, according to the *GDC*, "along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ, 'for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds . . . ' (*DCG* (1971) 25b), as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life" (*GDC*, #85).

What are the pastoral implications of this statement? First, there must be an underlying understanding that "the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ" (*CT* 5). The liturgy is the means by which Christians express and experience intimacy with Jesus Christ. As *SC* states:

Evangelization, conversion and faith find their ultimate expression in the liturgy, which, in turn, is the source of all holiness. At the same time, liturgical participation commits one to a life of faithful discipleship. (*SC*, #5)

Catechesis *for* liturgy enables people to participate fully in the liturgy.

Catechesis *from* liturgy—reflection on liturgical experience—serves to deepen people's understanding of the mysteries celebrated in liturgy.

The second pastoral implication is that both catechesis *for* liturgy and catechesis *from* liturgy must be grounded in the theological foundations of liturgy.

The final pastoral implication is that all catechesis needs to be done with a "liturgical lens." This means that catecheti-

Reflection Questions for Individuals and Groups

Select some of the following questions to help you assimilate your understanding of this article.

1. What new insights about the relationship between liturgy and catechesis did you gain from this article?
2. What questions and concerns did this article raise for you about liturgy and catechesis in your parish?
3. How does catechesis in your parish lead people to ongoing conversion to Christ? How does it lead to communion with Christ?
4. How does catechesis in your parish flow from and lead to liturgy?
5. What is catechesis *for* liturgy? What is catechesis *from* liturgy?
6. How would a "liturgical lens" change the way you do catechesis in your parish? What would be the implications for your parish?

cal leaders must understand the integral relationship of catechesis and liturgy and approach their ministry from this perspective. Viewing catechesis through this "liturgical lens" will lead to catechesis that intentionally and systematically:

- incorporates the Word of God (GDC, #95);
- is inspired by the catechuminate as a model of catechetical activity (#91);
- draws upon and makes use of liturgical rites and symbols;
- accentuates the liturgical year, especially the Sunday Eucharist (SC, #102);
- integrates ongoing liturgical and sacramental catechesis
- underscores the relationship between liturgy and justice.

The essential mutuality of catechesis and liturgy must characterize all catechesis. As SC states: "Catechesis is fundamental if the community is to be fully aware of what it is doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by its effects"

(SC, #7). The GDC concurs when it notes that: the Church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy (see CSL 14) and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. (GDC, #85)

Closing Prayer



Good and gracious God, you call us to be your people, echoing your Word and presence through our ordinary lives as we strive to bring about your reign in our world today. We pray that we will continue to recognize and respond to your presence as we go forth to evangelize our world with your good news and promote a new vision and new direction for the catechetical ministry of all people. We ask for your blessing and intimate presence on our ongoing journey of conversion, becoming disciples who will transform the world through proclaiming and living Gospel values.

We ask this in your name. Amen.

The challenge for catechetical leaders today is to provide for catechesis that leads to conversion to, and communion with, Christ. This is the vision set forth in the Gospel story of the journey to Emmaus and articulated in the GDC. It is a vision to which we should dedicate ourselves both as Christians and catechists.

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For Further Reading

"Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*).¹" In *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*. Third Edition. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.

"Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly." In *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*. Third Edition. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.

"Lectionary for Mass: Introduction." In *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*. Third Edition. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991.

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