



EVANGELIZING

New Vision - New Directions

CATECHESIS

2016 Reflections

Article 1. Evangelization and the Catechist

by Joseph Paprocki

Perhaps no other line the *General Directory for Catechesis* has shaped my own ministry more than the following: *No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process* (156).

I believe that with every fiber of my being which is why I have traveled thousands of miles crisscrossing North America over the past several decades to provide formation for countless numbers of catechists. It is why I have hosted my blog, *Catechist's Journey*, since 2007. It is the primary reason I write the books that I write. I do it because catechists are indispensable. As someone who works for a publisher of catechetical textbooks, I might wish that years from now, folks will look back and recall fondly the wonderful textbook they used in religious education when they were children. In truth, however, I know that what they will recall will be, for better or worse, the people who served as their catechists. It is imperative, then, that they will recall these catechists as true witnesses to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In his article, "Evangelization and the Catechist," John E. Hurley, C.S.P. thoughtfully articulated the importance of catechists being more than simply "conveyers of information" but rather, witnesses to the Gospel. He stressed that, rather than a job or a task, being a catechist is a "way of life." I couldn't agree more. And, as we forge ahead in the New Evangelization, I see these concepts as more crucial than ever. At the same time, however, I see signs that these concepts are in danger of being ignored. In an effort to incorporate "new media" into the catechetical process—something I fully believe in—there is an alarming tendency to assign the role of the evangelizer to the persona who appears on screen while reducing the role of the "live" catechist to pressing the "play" button. In other words, I see signs that we are, in essence, giving up on forming catechists as true evangelizers and are instead replacing them with virtual evangelizers. Likewise, there is a growing tendency to see catechists today as mere "curators" of information who point learners in the right direction and then step aside to allow individuals to interact with content as if the content alone can foster transformation.

If the New Evangelization is going to be successful, it will indeed need to incorporate "new media" and technologies as resources in the same way that textbooks are resources. However, these should never be at the expense of the person of the catechist. Our efforts to evangelize the next generation should not include an end-run around the present generation of catechists (including parents who are their children's primary catechists) who represent our best hope for facilitating the change of heart

that evangelizing catechesis seeks to foster. While it's nice to view in a video or read in a textbook about what it means to be on fire for the Lord, it is much more effective to actually encounter and interact with someone who is on fire for Christ.

Joe Paprocki, DMin, is the National Consultant for Faith Formation for Loyola Press, a Jesuit Ministry. Joe, who is a well-known speaker and best-selling author, serves as a catechist in the Archdiocese of Chicago and blogs about the experience at www.catechistsjourney.com.