

The Catechetical Review

January - March 2016

Communicating Christ for a New Evangelization

JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY



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The Catechetical Review

January-March Vol. 2 No. 1

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Lay Dominican Community

Publisher: Franciscan University of Steubenville

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The Catechetical Review (Print ISSN 2375-0642; Online ISSN 2379-6324) is published quarterly January, April, July, and October for \$28.00 (\$38.00 outside the U.S.) per year by Franciscan University of Steubenville, 1235 University Blvd., Steubenville, OH 43952.

See website for bulk and multi-year pricing.

Subscriptions: Mail subscription orders to *The Catechetical Review*, 1235 University Blvd, Steubenville, OH 43952; subscribe online at *Catechetics.com*; call 866-538-7426. *Free downloadable sample issue available on website.*

Editorial Contributions: Editorial submissions should have a clear catechetical focus and run approximately 800-1500 words on average. Longer articles are accepted, but may need to be broken into parts. Submissions for "Encountering God in Catechesis" department should only be 150-700 words. Email digital Word documents along with a brief biographical statement to: editor@catechetics.com.

Upcoming Themes:

April-June 2016: ***The Desire for God***

Submission deadline: CLOSED

July-September 2016: ***Supporting the Family***

Submission deadline: March 1, 2016

October-December 2016:

Catechesis and the Word of God

Submission deadline: June 1, 2016

January-March 2017:

Conscience and the True Good

Submission deadline: September 1, 2016

Inquiries: call 740-283-6235 or
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Features

6 Living the Year of Mercy

Edward Sri

9 Mercy: A Brief Catechetical Reflection

John C. Cavadini

14 Laudato Si: An Appeal for Integral Ecology

Fr. Daniel Pattee, TOR

26 Series: The Catechism & the New Evangelization Lesson Planning with Catechism, Part 1

Petec Willey

29 Noëlle Le Duc and Her Pedagogy: Serving the Child's Act of Faith, Part 2

Waltraud Linnig

36 Series: Catechesis for Persons with Disabilities No Stumbling Block for Persons with Physical Disabilities

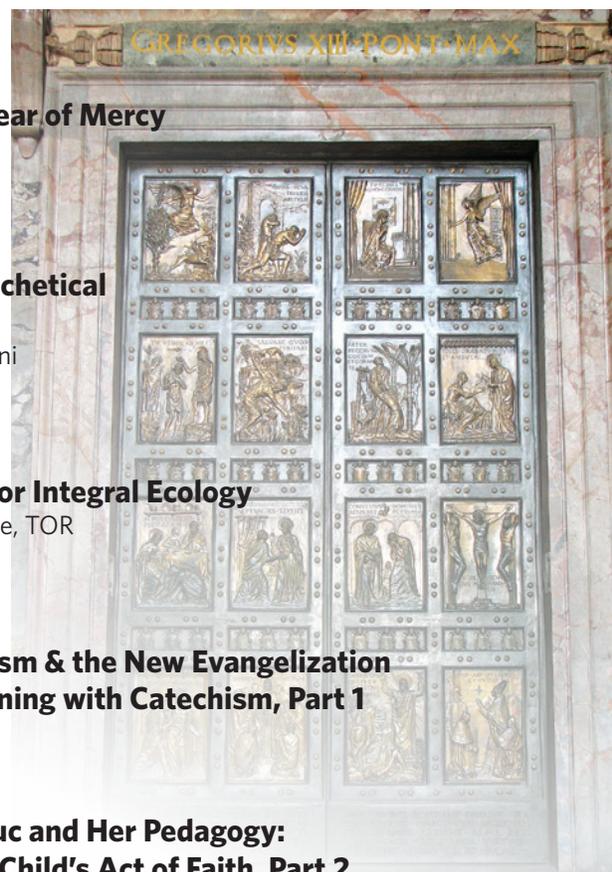
Sr. M. Johanna Paruch, FSGM

38 Saint John Paul II: A Model Catechist for Our Times

Jem Sullivan

42 Book Review

Suzanne M. Lewis



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Departments

5	Editor's Reflections James Pauley	32	The Spiritual Life Elizabeth Siegel
12	From the Shepherds Bishop James Wall	34	Children's Catechesis Joseph White
17	RCIA & Adult Faith Formation Martha Fernández-Sardina	39	Youth & Young Adult Ministry Bob Rice
21	Inspired Through Art Linus Meldrum	40	Encountering God in Catechesis Testimonies from Catechists

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Dialogue: A Gesture of Mercy

By James Pauley

Many readers will fondly remember the last Jubilee year—indeed, the Great Jubilee Year—commemorating the two-thousandth anniversary of the incarnation of God's Son in history. St. John Paul II understood this event to be the apex of his pontificate and, for many of us, the image of the frail, beloved pontiff opening the Jubilee door of St. Peter's Basilica remains etched in memory.

Pope Francis has now led us into the second Jubilee year of the third millennium, this Jubilee of Mercy. Seeing mercy as the very substance of the Church's proclamation to the world, our Holy Father asks Christians to fix their gaze upon the Merciful One—and receive the gift of mercy he offers—so that each will become a true “oasis of mercy” for others.¹

While Pope Francis is encouraging catechists to teach the mercy of God, he goes further in asking for what could be called a *methodology of mercy*. He writes that the Church's very “language and gestures must transmit mercy.”² What might this mean in the pastoral context of catechesis and evangelization? This is an important question with a multitude of answers.

As I've considered this, I am reminded of the pope's historic address to the U.S. Congress on September 24, 2015. During this speech, he employed the term “dialogue” twelve times. He repeatedly described his presence in the United States as an attempt to enter into dialogue with the American people.

There are some who might blanch at the idea of the Vicar of Christ exercising his teaching office by entering into dialogue. Faced with today's aggressive relativism and pervasive cultural deference to ideas frequently unreasonable and untrue, the concept of “dialogue” might appear to diminish the Church's voice in the world into merely one among many. I believe, though, that Francis' personal insistence on the dialogical approach is a vital element of his methodology of mercy and is a key to our own evangelistic fecundity today.

Entering into genuine dialogue with another means entering a conversation where truly hearing the other is equally important to helping the other understand one's own position. This kind of authentic exchange requires one to empathically listen and receive the concerns and convictions being voiced, to not only “put oneself in the shoes” of the other, but to actually aim for real understanding. This can be done, *even if one is not in agreement with the other's position*. Such an approach to communication bespeaks a profound respect, kindness, and a sincere desire to truly understand. Certainly our Holy Father believes—showing

us by his own example—that this must be the way forward in fruitfully proposing Christ today. If others are going to truly *hear* the truth of Christ, it is necessary that they must at the same time be *heard*. Such an approach is *merciful* as it represents a desire for genuine solidarity with the other, even when disagreement is present.

This approach is not new to the magisterial vision for evangelization. The *General Directory for Catechesis*, after all, suggests that evangelization be approached in stages “The proclamation of the Gospel and the call to conversion” comes only after (and, arguably, amidst) “dialogue and presence in charity.”³ Only when another person is loved, respected, and accepted might there be an authentic opening to the Truth of which we are all so desperately in need.

There is, however, a tension here. The process of dialogue can also be frequently promoted by those who espouse a relativistic view of the world. True proclamation of an objective reality is, for them, an impossibility—and therefore all that remains is subjective expression. An approach to dialogue within evangelization that moves proclamation to the periphery is disingenuous. While Jesus most certainly entered into dialogue with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, that dialogue (“what are you discussing?”) prepared them for proclamation (“was it not necessary that the messiah should suffer these things...”).⁴

Cardinal Timothy Dolan has described well the need for dialogue—accompaniment *and* proclamation—call to conversion. He wrote recently, “If we only accompany but do not convert, then we simply walk beside people farther into the night, away from the community of faith in Jerusalem. If we only question and listen, then we withhold from people the saving news of salvation.” The Cardinal suggests we learn from the full Emmaus account and proposes that our mission today is “to draw near, to accompany, to question, to listen, to rebuke the lack of faith, to teach the truth of the Gospel, to reveal Christ, to restore hope, to convert, to return to the Church.”⁵

Such a methodology, truly expressive of the language and gestures of mercy, has much to offer today's catechists as we engage contemporary people with the proposal of Christ.

Dr. James Pauley is Associate Professor of Theology and Catechetics at Franciscan University of Steubenville.

Notes

- 1 Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, arts. 10-13.
- 2 *Ibid.*, art. 12.
- 3 *General Directory for Catechesis*, art. 47.
- 4 Luke 24:13-35.
- 5 Cardinal Timothy Dolan, “Lord, To Whom Shall We Go?” *Catholic New York*, Oct26, 2015 (accessed at <http://cny.org/stories/Report-on-the-Synod,13240>).



LIVING THE YEAR OF MERCY

By Edward Sri

If you walked into your local grocery store and asked the average person in America, “What does the Catholic Church stand for?” what would be the response?

Many would focus on the moral issues: “The Catholic Church is against abortion, against contraception, and against ‘gay marriage.’” Almost no one would say: “The Catholic Church stands for God who is love and who created us out of love; who invites us to share in his love; who sent his Son to die for us out of love; and who wants to forgive us no matter what we’ve done and heal us so that we can be happy in this life and with him forever in heaven.”

God’s love and mercy are at the very heart of the Gospel; yet, most people, even many Catholics, don’t know this central point of our faith. This is one reason that Pope Francis has called for the extraordinary Jubilee called “The Year of Mercy.”

The Priority of Mercy

Pope Francis is driven by a pressing desire to bring God’s mercy to “the outermost fringes of society.”¹ Like Christ, whose public ministry was marked by his constant search for the weak, suffering, and lost souls in his day, Pope Francis says that the Church should be continually going out to touch as many people as possible with God’s mercy. “How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!”²

How effective are we as witnesses to God’s mercy? We might hold to the right doctrines, right liturgical practices, and right moral principles, but how much do people encounter God’s loving mercy in us and in our parishes, apostolates, or individual lives?

In this Year of Mercy, the pope invites us to a renewed encounter with Christ’s merciful love. By experiencing

God’s mercy at a deeper level in our own lives, we can be more effective witnesses to that mercy in the world.

Here are four simple things every individual, family, or parish can do to live the Year of Mercy.

1. Recognize How Much You Need God’s Mercy

Christians often talk about God’s mercy. But do we personally *experience* it day-to-day? Pope Francis is challenging us, in this Year of Mercy, to go deeper, much deeper. He’s inviting us to encounter Christ anew and in a way that overcomes the barriers to receiving his mercy.

What are those barriers? Sometimes, we lack self-awareness and fail to see the truth about ourselves. We might think the most urgent thing we need to work on in our spiritual lives is purity, prayer, or fasting, but God might want us first to grow in humility, patience, or compassion. We also might be good at noticing the shortcomings in the people around us but fail to recognize our own weaknesses. We’re quick to condemn someone’s lack of piety or immoral choices, but make excuses for our own little infidelities to prayer and repeated sins. We’re impatient with our spouse’s faults but unaware of how our own stubbornness or inability to see things from the other’s perspective is affecting the marriage.

The first step in encountering God’s mercy is recognizing how much we need it. It’s crucial that we acknowledge this need not just abstractly (“As a fallen human being, I need God’s mercy”), but also experientially at the core of our being (“Lord, I’m a mess...I’m really struggling...I can’t do this...I need you...Please help me”). Only when we come humbly before the Lord as we really are—without pretense, self-deception, excuses, or directing the blame to others—can we truly encounter God’s mercy and begin to grow.

2. Encounter God’s Mercy—“In the Valley of Humility”

Facing up to our real self, however, can be painful. We feel our faults and weaknesses. We’re sad we’re not doing better and wish we didn’t need God’s mercy so much. We wish we could present ourselves to God as holy and without blemish, and we get frustrated when we fall short.

But our sorrow and discouragement over our sins are not always pure. Often there is more focus on ourselves



than on God (“I can’t believe *I* did that!”). On the surface, our frustration looks like humility, but underneath, a hidden pride might be lurking. As Jacques Phillippe explains, “We are not sad and discouraged so much because God was offended, but because the ideal image that we have of ourselves has been brutally shaken. Our pain is very often that of wounded pride! This excessive pain is actually a sign that we have put our trust in ourselves—in our own strength and not in God.”³

St. Therese of Lisieux once told her sister Celine, “You wish to scale a mountain, but the good God wants you to descend; he is waiting for you at the bottom of the fertile valley of humility.”⁴ This beautiful statement captures the Gospel of Mercy: God wants to meet us not where we’d like to be, high up on the mountain of perfection, but just as we are, in the valley of humility. Why? On one hand, God wants us to know how much he loves us right now. Our soul’s value is not dependent on how well we perform.

He loves us as we are, even with all our fears, wounds, weaknesses, and sins.

On the other hand, God wants us to be convinced of how utterly dependent we are on him, so that we might surrender every area of our lives to him. The more we are convinced of our littleness, the more God fills us with his grace to comfort us in our afflictions, change our hearts, and overcome our sins. The more we encounter God’s mercy in this way—his love, his forgiveness, his saving help—the more fruitful we will be in sharing his mercy in the world.

3. Take on the Heart of Christ— Compassion, Not Judgment

How do you respond when you notice someone’s faults?

Perhaps someone you know gossips a lot, is cohabitating, doesn’t go to Mass, or voted for a certain political candidate. Or maybe your spouse is grumpy, your child is disrespectful, or a coworker says something that hurts you. Many of us are quick to critique or judge such a person, but a true encounter with God’s mercy should soften our hearts and make us more patient with other people’s weaknesses. Pope Francis says we should always have “an endless desire to show mercy.”⁵

While we are called to proclaim Christ’s teachings and even at times to correct others, we must do so without making judgments concerning a person’s moral responsibility. St. Catherine of Siena taught that the devil may sometimes allow us to see certain facts about a person’s life (they’re not pro-life, he’s cranky today, she’s always complaining), so that we’re tempted to set ourselves in judgment over them, but we usually don’t see the whole picture: the person’s upbringing, hurts, ignorance, intentions, and circumstances. Various factors in people’s lives may impair their free choices in such a way that limits their culpability or moral guilt (CCC 1735). As Pope Francis explains, “each person’s situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without.”⁶ For example, a young woman may engage in unchaste acts that are objectively wrong, but if she has never experienced love from her parents and friends, has been sexually abused and has come to believe that this is the only way she will be valued by others, and if she has always been encouraged in such behavior and has never had Catholic teaching on sexuality explained to her, how culpable is she before God? Only God can tell. One thing that is clear is that such a woman needs from us hearts that are full of compassion and not judgment. She needs to know God’s love and the love of the Christian community, not just a lesson about the moral law.

In the end, if we truly come to terms with our own weakness and sin and experience how merciful God is with us, then we will be more patient, compassionate, and forgiving in the face of others’ shortcomings. We will be

more eager to help people than to critique them. If we are quick to judge people in our hearts, though, it may be a sign that we do not truly know ourselves. As St. Bernard of Clairvaux taught, “You will never have real mercy for the failings of another until you know and realize that you have the same failings in your soul.”⁷

4. Encounter the Poor—The Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy

If we truly encounter God’s mercy, we also will desire to share his love more with the poor and suffering. In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis wants us to give not just money, but *ourselves* to the poor. He wants us to encounter the poor personally, look at them, listen to them, and treat them with dignity as brothers and sisters.

“I sometimes ask people: ‘Do you give alms?’ They say to me: ‘Yes, Father.’ And when you give alms do you look the person you are giving them in the eye?’ ‘Oh, I don’t know, I don’t really notice.’ ‘Then you have not really encountered them. You tossed him the alms and walked off. When you give alms, do you touch the person’s hand or do

you throw the coin?’ ‘No, I throw the coin.’ ‘So you did not touch him. And if you don’t touch him you don’t meet him.’”⁸

Living in solidarity with the poor and caring for them are crucial signs of a faithful Catholic. It was a chief criterion for St. Paul, when he preached the Gospel to the gentiles. The apostles told Paul to make sure to “remember the poor” (cf. Gal 2:10). Indeed, Paul’s Christian communities throughout Asia Minor and Greece cared for the poor and served as “a prophetic, counter-cultural resistance to the self-centered hedonism of paganism.”⁹

As a new pagan culture emerges in our own day, Pope Francis summons us to give the same Christian witness that the early Church provided. He exhorts us to build communities that care

for the weak and vulnerable and thus stand in stark contrast with the individualistic age in which we live. We must address both material and spiritual poverty and thus care for the homeless on the streets, the lonely within their own homes, those hungering for food, and those hungering for love. The pope, then, calls for the corporal and spiritual works of mercy to be at the forefront during this

Jubilee. If we take these steps, at the end of this holy year, the Church will be an even more shining witness to the God of mercy.

Edward Sri, S.T.D. is Professor of Theology at the Augustine Institute and author of Pope Francis and the Joy of the Gospel: Rediscovering the Heart of a Disciple.

By experiencing God’s mercy at a deeper level in our own lives, we can be more effective witnesses to that mercy in the world.



Notes

- 1 Cf. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, art. 14.
- 2 *Ibid.*, art. 5.
- 3 Jacques Philippe, *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*, 58-59.
- 4 St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Counsels and Reminiscences*. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/therese/autobio.xxi.html>
- 5 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, art. 24.
- 6 *Ibid.*, art. 172.
- 7 St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Steps of Humility and Pride*, 6.
- 8 Pope Francis, Video message to the faithful of Buenos Aires on the occasion of the Feast of St. Cajetan (August 7, 2013). www.news.va
- 9 EG, art. 193.

Mercy: A Brief Catechetical Reflection

By John C. Cavadini

At the end of his announcement of the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis invoked the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy: “Let us henceforth entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey: our penitential journey, our year-long journey with an open heart ...”¹ This invocation of Mary, Mother of Mercy was underscored by the announcement that the Holy Year will begin on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Let’s think about these two titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary together and ask ourselves how they are related.

The Blessed Mother – Borne by God’s Grace and Mercy

Mary *is* the Immaculate Conception. This is how she identified herself to St. Bernadette. That she was immaculately conceived does not mean that she existed outside the economy of redemption, on her own independent track, but rather that she, by the merits of her Son, was redeemed in a unique way, preserved immune from all stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception.² The “stain” of original sin is, of course, not a physical stain, but rather it refers to the impairment of freedom and therefore of the ability to love. This is the legacy of original sin. For this reason, either we are afraid of the consequences of choosing the good, or some other alternative seems more attractive. We can even choose the right alternative but for the wrong reasons or for mixed motives. Consider the power disparity that exists between Mary, a creature, and her Creator! Although it would not have been a sin to say “no,” Mary could have said “yes” to her vocation out of fear of God’s power or out of attraction to the status God could provide her! In a case like this, “in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith ... it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God’s grace.”³

God’s grace is God’s mercy, and therefore Mary had to be wholly borne by God’s mercy. God’s mercy elected her for this vocation, and in and by God’s mercy she was able to assent with perfect freedom to God’s request. Because she *is* the Immaculate Conception, her whole being is defined by God’s mercy, and her “yes” is a completely unhindered act of assent to all of God’s merciful plans towards humankind that come to their fruition in the Incarnation. She is the “Mother of Mercy” in the sense that her motherhood is a gift of God’s mercy, and also in

the sense that she is literally the Mother of the Incarnate Word, who is God’s mercy extended to us.

Devotion to Mary, Mother of Mercy, helps us realize that the Incarnation, as God’s greatest work of mercy, is not an abstract concept but is a Person. “Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2.6-7). Devotion to Mary deepens our awareness of how far that “self-emptying” mercy went, namely, to the point where the “Almighty became weak for us,”⁴ in other words, to the point where he became the direct opposite of almighty, a helpless baby who “uttered crying noises like all other children”⁵ and was completely dependent upon his mother. The divine compassion is concrete, not abstract, and the more devoted to Mary we are, the more a vista of the depth of this compassion, or mercy, dawns on our spiritual vision and we cry out: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (Gen 28:17) The mercy of God is the *gate of heaven*, and in contemplating its awesomeness we stand on heaven’s threshold! There is nothing more powerful than the contemplation of God’s self-emptying mercy to prompt conversion.

Beginning with Spiritual Conversion

This is the “spiritual conversion” that Pope Francis mentioned in his homily announcing the Year of Mercy, when he said that the journey of mercy is “a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion...” Pope Francis continued, “we want to live this year in the light of the Word of the Lord: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’” (cf. Lk 6:36).⁶ Those most inclined to show mercy, to do the works of mercy, are those who are most deeply aware of the mercy they’ve received. In light of the mercy we receive, we can begin to see the hardness of heart in our lives—whether towards a family member, a fellow worker, the vulnerable in our midst, the poor, our enemies, or even God Himself—for what it is, and repelled by its ugliness, we are moved to do better. But the *Catechism* makes it clear that the primary impulse towards conversion “is in discovering the greatness of God’s love.” It continues, “The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.” Quoting Clement of Rome, the *Catechism* urges us, “Let us fix our eyes on Christ’s blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured

out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.”⁷ In other words, the primary motivation towards the converted life is not the ugliness of our sins, but our realization of how precious the blood of Christ—his outpouring of mercy—is, and we begin to want to participate in something so precious and so awesome on the giving end as well as on the receiving end. Travelling the road of mercy, we want to cross the threshold of heaven.

A Map for the Road of Mercy

How do we participate in the giving and receiving of mercy? We Catholics have a handy little manual of mercy, a roadmap, as it were, for the journey of mercy. This is drawn up in two lists of the “works of mercy,” spiritual and corporeal. The corporeal works of mercy: *To feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit and ransom prisoners, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, and bury the dead.* The spiritual works of mercy: *To admonish sinners, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, to pray for the living and the dead.* The works of mercy, taken together, describe a life structured by mercy, and they invite the imagination into the full dimensions of mercy that reach

into the misery of our world at every level. The works of mercy are also, in a way, a thumbnail description of the dimensions of human dignity, of what, in a sense, is owed a human person who is in any of the conditions of affliction or misery or need mentioned, and that is all of us in some way or another. The life dedicated to the works of mercy is the life dedicated to the affirmation of human dignity and so to the praise of the Creator who endowed human beings with such dignity and came among us as Incarnate mercy. The works of mercy, therefore, are works of praise and worship to God, Creator and Redeemer.

Since the very meaning of human life is to offer such worship, the life dedicated to the works of mercy is the most fulfilling life, the “happy life” to use classical terminology. It is indeed the life at the threshold of the gate of heaven.

Realizing this, we can see immediately that the problem of how to participate in the giving as well as of the receiving of mercy is actually not an easy one! It’s not enough to pile up works of mercy and then think we have offered the requisite praise to God, for even the works of mercy are prone to distortion. In a famous section of *The City of God*, Augustine analyzes what it means to worship God. He proposes that the only act that everyone recognizes

as due to God and only to God is *sacrifice*. He then further proposes that the only acceptable and true sacrifice, from a biblical point of view, is *misericordia*, mercy or compassion, and that all exterior “works of mercy” or “acts of compassion” (depending on how one translates *opera misericordiae*) are only truly merciful or compassionate if they are the signs of an interior act of sacrifice, if they are done for the sake of God. Only then do they attain the stature of the worship of God.⁸ One might react to this by saying, “but the whole *point* of the works of mercy is



that they are done for the sake of the neighbor!” In fact, though, anything done for the sake of God alone, and truly for his sake—in response to his initiative of mercy, as we have seen—is done, we could say, for no ulterior motive. Only then is it truly a *sacrifice*. Only then is it truly and fully done for the neighbor. For, let’s face it, it is easy to slip into the works of mercy or compassion for mixed motives. It is easier to feel compassionate towards the rich (because they can help us in return), towards the powerful (because we would like the status that comes from association with them), and towards those who will praise us (even if the praise is a form of self-congratulation or self-righteousness in our hearts). Unlike Mary, however, we all carry the taint of original sin, that diminishment of our freedom which makes it impossible, on our own, to make a pure self-gift, a pure act of worship, and therefore a pure work of mercy or act of compassion.

The Eucharistic Life and our Continual Purification

The solution, as Augustine explains, is not an abstract but concrete work of mercy in time and history, one so profound that it is the one true and completely unmixed act of worship ever offered to God. We have already encountered it! It is the self-emptying of the Word of God into solidarity with the human race in our condition of self-inflicted misery. It is the passion and death of the Incarnate Word, but not simply as past events. Otherwise, we are dealing in abstractions. In the Resurrection, God the Father accepted this act of worship by his Incarnate Son. It lives anew; it transcends its original time and place, and in the Eucharist this greatest Work of Mercy is once again made present for us. We can enter into *the hour* of Christ’s total self-gift on the cross and receive the gift of communion with this greatest Work of Mercy. We are ready to sacrifice even our own works of mercy in gratitude for this one, offering them to the Father in praise for the gift we have received. We receive them back, in a way, as his work, enlivened with his life.

The eucharistic life is thus the life of mercy, and the life of mercy is the Eucharistic life. The more we receive Holy Communion, the more our life becomes a participation in the perfect act of worship, of self-gift, of compassion and mercy, which we could never give ourselves. We don’t have to obsess about the imperfections in our own works of mercy because the Eucharistic life is the life of continual purification, transformation, and conversion of ourselves and all our works into the one act of compassion that binds us into One Body as Church and sends us out as missionaries of mercy, as the true sacrificial presence of Christ in the world. We learn to subsist on the Bread of Heaven rather than on our own private stores, on the sweet

taste of a growing gratitude for the Precious Blood shed on our behalf and given to us at every Mass. Our gratitude becomes, in turn, a delight in self-gift that purifies our works of mercy of their mixed motives, little by little, and makes of them one continuous *sacrifice of praise* for all of the gifts the Creator has given us. In a truly perfected soul, this roots out the seeds of violence completely, something we see in the legends of St. Francis. Even the animals could sense that Francis had rooted out these seeds of violence by his configuration to the most burning love of Christ crucified, and all of them—rabbits, birds, fish, lambs, and wolves—approached his bosom as an oasis of mercy in a violent world.

If we undertake the works of mercy in union with Christ crucified, made present in the Eucharist, they make of the whole world a place of eucharistic presence, a place where there are true refuges from violence, misery and hatred. This mercy makes the world itself a little more like heaven. “All the way to heaven is heaven” for those who live the merciful life, the eucharistic life, in which we have not only the gate of heaven, but heaven on earth.

To return to our starting point, in this context devotion to the Mother of Mercy takes the form of a contemplation of the final destiny of our pilgrimage of mercy because we see in her the fullness of the redemption, which the whole Church, and we hope the whole of creation, will attain. “The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of His Love.”⁹ Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is not worship of Mary, but contemplation of and worship of the mercy that transfigured the whole of her being, body and soul, and made her the Eschatological Icon of the Church,¹⁰ completely free, completely purified, completely “deified.” The Immaculate Conception is a person, not a concept. May our devotion to her intensify our zeal to be perfected in this mercy, too and thereby direct us with ever-renewed vigor to the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of mercy and the means of our perfection in mercy, of which she is, after all, the Mother.

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Notes

- 1 Pope Francis, Homily, March 13, 2015.
- 2 See CCC, pars. 491-92; *Lumen Gentium* arts. 53, 56.
- 3 CCC, par. 490.
- 4 Augustine, Sermon 212.1.
- 5 Origen, *On First Principles* 2.6.2.
- 6 Pope Francis, Homily, March 13, 2015.
- 7 CCC, par. 1432.
- 8 See Augustine, *City of God* 10.4-6.
- 9 Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, art. 24.
- 10 See CCC, par. 973.

Encountering Christ in the Liturgy

By Bishop James Wall

The central theme of Pope Saint John's Paul II's post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*, is the encounter with the living Jesus Christ. As he points out, the Second Vatican Council identified a "manifold presence of Christ in the [sacred] liturgy," and he insists that this presence should be a theme of constant preaching on the part of the Church.¹ Liturgies are guaranteed encounters with the Living Christ because they spring from the will and power of God and not from our efforts. This manifold encounter with Jesus in the liturgy is central to the teaching, to the catechesis, and to the evangelization of Holy Mother Church.

The Vatican II *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states: "Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations."² It is within the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass that Jesus Christ is made present in four distinct ways: through the Word, assembly, minister, and the Eucharist. This fourfold presence of Christ is not merely poetry or analogy, but reality. The four presences of Jesus in the liturgy are different kinds of presence, but each unites us to his heart. There is a transformative power that comes from these encounters with Jesus Christ; the transformation is life-changing and draws us deeper into the mysteries of Christ.

Present in the Word

Christ is made present when the Word is proclaimed at Mass. When the Word is proclaimed, it is Christ himself who speaks. His power and voice aren't bound by time and space like our own, but through his divine eternity we are formed by his words just as the crowds of Galilee were. As Mary sat at the feet of our Lord, hanging on his every

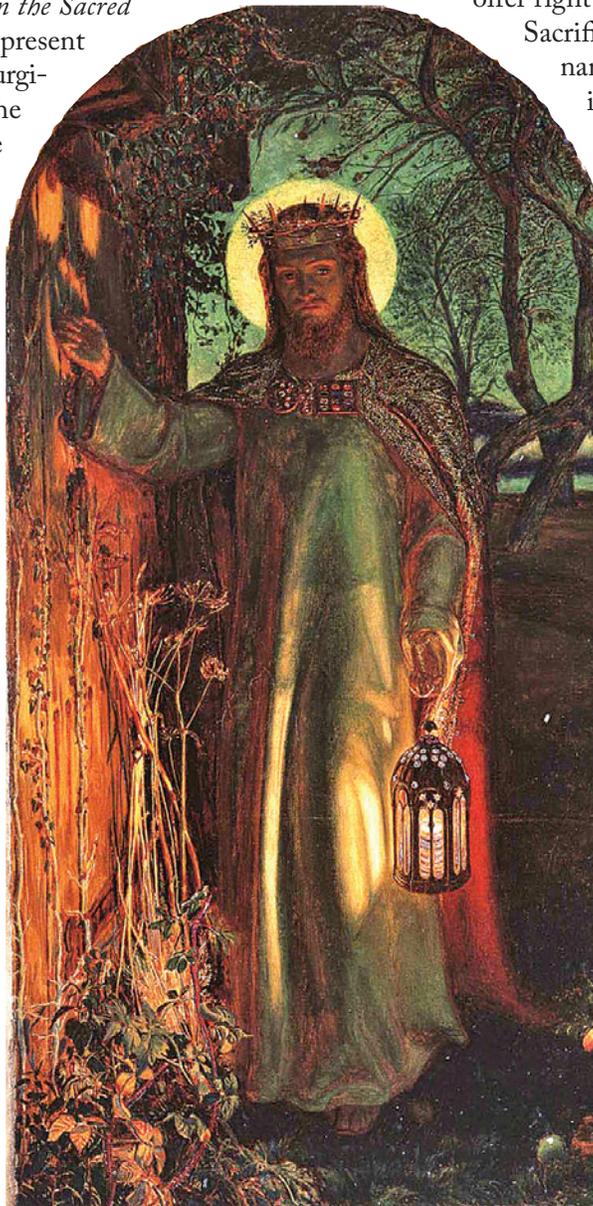
Word, so too should the gathered assembly open their hearts and minds up to God's revealed Word. The difficulty we experience in the modern world is that so much clamors for our attention. Distractedness during Mass pulls us away from an encounter with Christ in the Word. The remedy is simple: it is to turn the heart back toward the proclaimed Word and an encounter with the Living Christ.

Present in the Assembly

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). The People of God gather as a liturgical assembly, in order to offer right praise and worship to God in the Sacrifice of the Mass. They gather in the name of Jesus Christ and are united in Christian charity, as a unified worshipping assembly.

The assembly has its origins in baptism, which unites men to Jesus and through Jesus to each other. It is grace that unites men to God and makes us his children and his friends.

Since God has decided to allow human beings to assist him in his work of salvation, we come to worship him as a people and a family. This unity is strengthened through the reception of hidden Jesus, who brings us into communion with himself, and so with the Father and the Son, and then through the Trinity in communion with our brothers and sisters. As Pope Pius XII wrote, "Christ our Lord wills the Church to live his own supernatural life, and by his divine power permeates his whole body and nourishes and sustains each of the members according to the place which they occupy in the body, in the same way as the vine nourishes and makes fruitful the branches which are joined to it."³



This gift from the heart of God is given special recognition in the Sacrifice of the Mass, especially in particular prayers found within the Roman Canon, which continually teaches us that the sacrifice is offered by Jesus Christ and by all men and women “through Him, with Him, and in Him.” We must gather in the name of Jesus and then go and live the life offered us through our union with Jesus. As we hear in one of the options for the dismissal at Mass, “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”

Present in the Minister

“Christ is present in the celebrant who renews at the altar the one and only sacrifice of the Cross.”⁴ The minister of the Eucharistic celebration, at the consecration, speaks the words, “This is my body” and “This is my blood,” because he acts *in persona Christi capitis*—“in the person of Christ the head.” As the *Catechism* informs us, “in the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as head of his body, shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, teacher of truth.”⁵ The priests bind on earth, and Jesus binds in heaven. They speak his words and will to do what he did, while he accomplishes the reality. They fulfill the command he gave on the night of the Last Supper, “Do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19). Because they act with his power and authority, and because he accomplishes his salvation through his priests, Christ is present when they celebrate the divine liturgy, enabling the people of God to share in the sacrifice according to their proper role and responsibility in the Mystical Body.

Present in the Eucharist

Pope St. John Paul II tells us that Jesus “is present ‘especially under the Eucharistic species.’ My predecessor Paul VI deemed it necessary to explain the uniqueness of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, which ‘is called “real” not to exclude the idea that the others are “real” too, but rather to indicate presence *par excellence*, because it is substantial’. Under the species of bread and wine, ‘Christ is present, whole and entire in his physical “reality,” corporally present.”⁶ Often in the history of the Church, the Church’s faith is clarified and explained only after some confusion and opposition has arisen. In response to error, recognizing that such-and-such a claim is false, the Church explains and defines the disputed points. This is the case with the Eucharist, when the Council of Trent (1547-1562) declared that Christ is *truly*, *really*, and *substantially* present in the Eucharist. These three terms are very important, and arose as the result of Protestant errors.

*When the Word is proclaimed, it is
Christ himself who speaks.*

Saying that Jesus is *truly* present is in answer to the error of Ulrich Zwingli who taught that Jesus was only present as a reminder of himself, as one might say about a photograph, “that’s my son.” This is not the way that Jesus is present in the Eucharist. Rather the Eucharist is Jesus; he is *truly* present.

Saying that Jesus is *really* present is in response to other reformation assertions that Jesus is only present by faith, in other words, that the Eucharist is simply an object which stimulates faith in him; but Jesus is present whether we believe in him or not, whether we recognize him or not, whether we treat him with the love and adoration he deserves or we simply ignore him.

Saying that Jesus is *substantially* present is in answer to the error of Calvin, who said that Jesus is “present” only in the sense that he works through the Eucharist, just as he works through baptism. The Church uses the term *substantially* present to show that he is really here, as truly as a friend standing before us.

In the Holy Eucharist, our Lord Jesus is truly present, truly there; he is present *sacramentally*, that is, hidden under the appearances of bread and wine. He hides himself this way to allow us to approach him, and in order to reveal to us that he himself wishes to nourish our souls in the way that bread and wine nourish our bodies. He is the true bread from heaven, and wishes to be the food that strengthens us to Eternal Life.

For Our Transformation

Let us not simply meditate on these sacred realities and divine gifts from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but let us allow them to take root in our lives and transform the way we live. Let us continually seek to refresh ourselves from the springs of salvation, and recognize with humble awe, more and more clearly, how Jesus continually calls and beckons us to approach him and be refreshed by his mercy. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

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Notes

- 1 John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, art. 12.
- 2 Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 7.
- 3 Pope Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, art. 55.
- 4 *Ecclesia in America*, art. 12.
- 5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1548.
- 6 *Ecclesia in America*, art. 12, quoting Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, art. 39.

LAUDATO SI

AN APPEAL FOR INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

By Fr. Daniel Pattee, TOR

Soon after promulgating *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, Blessed Pope Paul VI stated that what was needed for a fuller understanding of the encyclical was a fuller, more adequate anthropology. His successor, Pope Saint John Paul II, would later supply this fuller, more adequate anthropology when he expounded and developed his philosophical and theological anthropology of the human person. One needs only recall the series of Wednesday audiences wherein he developed what we now call the “theology of the body.”¹ Pope Benedict XVI later picked up a similar theme when he expounded a profound theological anthropology in *Caritas in Veritate* (June 9, 2009), while situating the human person in proper relation to the Trinity and to one’s neighbor in *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005). Pope Francis was indebted to these doctrinal developments of his predecessors when he came to write his most recent encyclical, *Laudato Si* (LS), a debt he acknowledges in the encyclical’s opening paragraphs (3-6). However, *Laudato Si* has a different emphasis, expressed in the opening words, which come from a canticle written in Old Italian and composed by St. Francis of Assisi in 1225: “Canticle of the Creatures.” By opening with this canticle, Pope Francis introduces the rich philosophical and theological anthropology of his predecessors into the relational context of the earth’s environment, which is contiguous with human life in the body.

A Fundamental Human Ecology

For example, Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si*, “Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine ecology” (155). Far from being a form of somatolatriy, or worship of the human body, Pope Francis here affirms the share we have as embodied persons in the surrounding physical environment. He gleans this insight from the account of creation in the Book of Genesis (chapters 1-3) where “in the beginning” human life was “grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself” (66). Then the Holy Father continues: “According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin” (ibid.). This

division—within ourselves, with God, with one another, and with the earth²—accounts for Pope Francis’ rather sobering judgment that the earth, “our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (21).

This is significant because it helps us to understand how the “human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation” (48). As it goes with ourselves, so it goes with the environment; if we neglect ourselves and our relationships to one another and God, then predictably neglect of the physical environment follows. A wholesome human ecology, which acknowledges and accepts the profound “relationship between human life and the moral law” (155), is a prerequisite for a wholesome environment. Neglect and abuse of the earth, therefore, are best explained by the deterioration in human ecology, as when the poorest and weakest among us are neglected and forgotten. Supplying in justice the proper care due to the human body would include a whole host of corporal works of mercy wherein we clothe the naked, feed the hungry, dress wounds, and supply adequate housing to the homeless. How we understand ourselves is reflected in how we treat one another and the environment. Consequently, the “acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father... whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation” (155).

The Limits of Power and Effects of Exploitation

We need only recall the refrain of women who favor abortion, “it’s my body and I am free to decide” as though such decisions are executed without any relationship to human ecology and the physical environment. Here absolute power over one’s own body reduces the child in the womb to property, free to be dispensed or retained, thrown away or kept like any other possession. Pope Francis affirms that exerting such absolute power over ourselves and our own bodies leads, by extension, to a similar exercise of absolute power and domination over the physical environment. The

examples of such exploitation of the earth abound within the encyclical, but Pope Francis also continues to remind us how “the poor end up paying the price” (170) of the unfettered harvesting of the earth’s resources. They are the ones left unemployed when a multi-national company relocates; they are the ones left behind to live with the resulting deteriorated environment, which is not only polluted but also depleted. “While some are concerned only with financial gain, and others with holding on to or increasing their power, what we are left with are conflicts or spurious agreements where the last thing either party is concerned about is caring for the environment and protecting those who are most vulnerable” (198). Perhaps it was just such alliances and strongholds in his day that accounted for a similar sobering assessment by Jesus when he said: “the poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7).

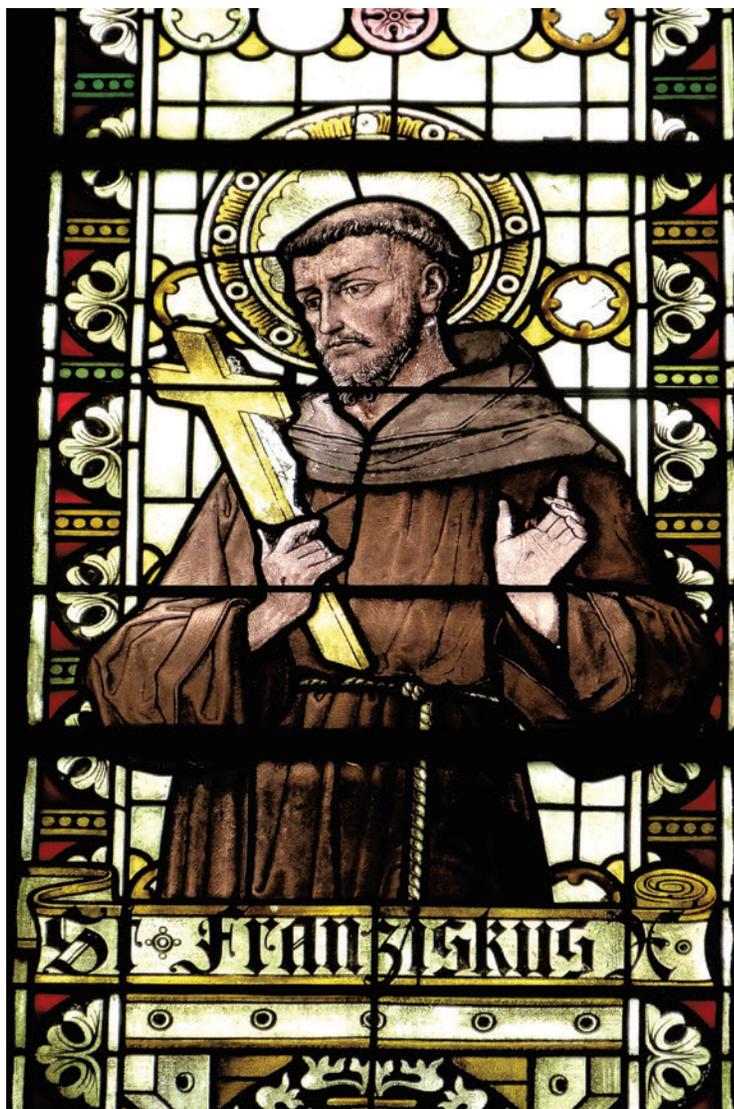
There are several instances where Pope Francis appears to accept global warming as an established, scientific fact brought on by unsustainable human consumption and intervention in the environment. For example, our Holy Father writes: “A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system.... Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it” (23). Statements like these have troubled some commentators on the encyclical, since there is concern over the Holy Father overstepping the bounds of his competence by accepting a conclusion that to their minds is scientifically dubious. Pope Francis was aware that some of his readers would question his statements in *Laudato Si*. He wrote: “There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. Here I would state once more that the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (188). Given the overall context of the encyclical and the numerous statements favoring a more integrated approach to problems of the environment, this statement of purpose seems all the more genuine.

Working for the Common Good

There is plenty of work for all men and women of good will to accomplish when it comes to improving the physical environment. This is the major thrust of Pope Francis’s encyclical: we all have our part to play in improving our common home; and he makes this broader appeal through frequent mention of the common good. There can be no doubt about the tre-

mendous benefits received through Christian faith and the restorative grace of Christ. The very title of the encyclical was taken from a canticle penned by a man, Francis of Assisi, who through faith in Christ was restored to full and vital relationship with God, himself, his neighbor, and the whole of creation. “Praise be you (*laudato si*), my Lord, with all your creatures, especially sir Brother Sun” (87). In the encyclical, the Holy Father also references St. Bonaventure, who interpreted the universal reconciliation experienced by Francis of Assisi as in some way returning him “to the state of original innocence” (66). These benefits of faith thus become all the more real in the light of St. Francis’s experience in creation. But Pope Francis is also mindful that we are all responsible, together, for the good of the earth—whether we are believers or unbelievers; Christians, Jews, or Muslims; atheists or agnostics—we are all responsible. So he addresses *Laudato Si* not only to believers in Christ, but also “to all people of good will” (62).

Pope Francis makes this broader appeal through a shared concern for the common good, which he defines using



a text from the Second Vatican Council: “The common good is ‘the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.’”³ This definition helps us to understand such statements as: “The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” (23). Industrial emissions in China affect the air quality in Australia, while higher stacks from coal plants in the United States can precipitate acid rain in Canada. Corporate decisions made in one country will directly affect local, regional, sometimes national and even international ecosystems and environments. Indeed, “everything is closely interrelated” (137) and nature “cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live” (139). We belong to nature and if nature becomes polluted with toxins, we can become sick as a result. Pope Francis’ appeal to the common good leads him to ask questions like, “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160) Who in their right mind would wish to grow up next to a stream that has deteriorated and become polluted through industrial waste? Such an environment wounds the local common good by decreasing the conditions within which human life can prosper and grow. Through appeal to the common good, therefore, Pope Francis makes many such common sense statements and judgments that most men and women, whether religious or not, can readily hear and understand.

In light of his appeal to the common good, one of Pope Francis’ solutions particularly stands out. It has long been the staple of Catholic social teaching that the State has been entrusted with care for the common good. This constitutes the ultimate purpose and reason for becoming an elected official, namely, to preserve those conditions within society wherein persons and intermediate groups of persons may prosper and attain their own fulfillment. One of our Holy Father’s solutions favoring both human ecology and the material environment, therefore, requires that politics not become subjected to the economy (189). He calls for an honest and frank dialogue between politicians and corporate, economic interests, but is also careful to point out that politicians can become hijacked from caring for the common good through private offers of economic or political gain. His call to politicians to have genuine concern for preserving the common good supplies the context of what might otherwise appear to be a number of dour, even Marxist comments against Capitalism. For example, he writes: “Once more, we need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals” (190). Here Pope Francis is not leveling a Marxist critique against Capitalism or even private enterprise; rather he is con-

cerned for the adulteration of the common good when economic interests steal away politicians from caring for the whole of society.

The Earth Is Our Common Home

It would be unfortunate to read *Laudato Si* and not hear the major thrust of the encyclical, namely, we human beings occupy, together, a common home called Earth and we must learn to care for her. We can no longer live as though we are unrelated to one another and to the physical environment. We all belong to Earth and each of us requires some share in her vast store of riches to live and prosper as human beings, not least of which includes clean air and water. Yet Pope Francis also reminds us of the universal destination of goods, that is, how Earth belongs to everyone and not just a select few. Quoting his predecessor Saint John Paul II, he wrote, “The principle of the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and ‘the first principle of the whole ethical and social order.’”⁴ Far from being a critique of private ownership by way of Marxist analysis, the Holy Father here simply limits private ownership by appealing to an absolute precept of the natural law, namely, God has given the earth to everyone throughout *all* generations and not just a few within any *one* generation. The ready access to fundamental human goods for life in certain areas of the world must become real in other areas where basic human needs are left unmet. The improvement of our human ecology will directly impact and lead toward an improvement in our environmental ecology. How we treat one another becomes extended to the physical environment. This is the meaning of what Pope Francis calls in *Laudato Si* an “integral ecology,” wherein the isolated human subject becomes given over to his or her native and personal embodiment such that relationship to God, one’s neighbor, and the physical environment are embraced. It was just such an integral experience—so full of relational communion in life and goodness—that led St. Francis of Assisi to express such deep gratitude to God in the words concluding the encyclical: “Praise be to You!” (246): *Laudato Si!*

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Notes

- 1 A series of 129 talks given on the Wednesdays between September 5, 1979 and November 28, 1984.
- 2 We need only recall Cain’s lament to the Lord after slaying his brother Abel to understand what Pope Francis means here: “Look, you have now banished me from the ground” (Gen 4:14, NABRE).
- 3 *Laudato Si*, art. 156 quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, art. 26.
- 4 *Laudato Si*, art. 93 quoting *Laborem Exercens*, art. 19.

Misericordiae Vultus: A Path to Encounter and Conversion for Prodigal Sons and Older Brothers Alike

By Martha Fernández-Sardina

Every new year brings new hopes, dreams, promises, and possibilities, as does the Year of Mercy! The Holy Father asks us to respond wholeheartedly to the call for a widespread and generous outpouring of mercy, despite the fact that this emphasis on mercy might *appear* to minimize the demands of justice and the law. Some may be surprised at this, as were the pharisees and scribes at the time of Jesus. At the same time, though, millions of Catholics and non-Catholics are delighted as they observe Pope Francis and his announcement of this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

How Does This Document About Mercy Affect Us?

During this Year of Mercy—*Annus Misericordiae*—we will contemplate and reflect the Face of Mercy, Christ’s Face, or the *Misericordiae Vultus*. We plunge into this contemplation in order to understand and become that which we contemplate, so all might find a path to conversion, a path home to our Father. The Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy outlines Pope Francis’ pastoral focus for the New Evangelization. In it, he stresses mercy as the core of a life-altering Gospel that can lead to deep *metanoia*, thus transforming our hearts into the meek and humble heart of Jesus, full of mercy and compassion. The pope believes, prophetically perhaps, that contemplating the face of mercy and allowing ourselves to be inwardly transformed by it will enable us to “be merciful like the

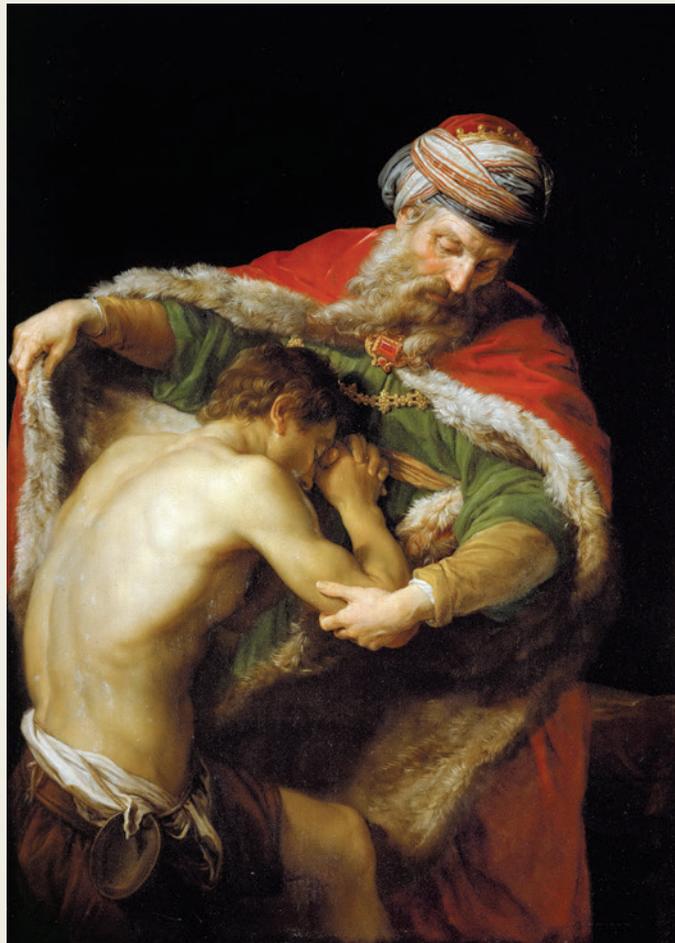
Father” (cf. Lk 6:36), as the motto for the Jubilee Year pronounces. Thus transformed, we will become instruments of conversion and transformation among “insiders” and “outsiders” alike, and thereby change the world. The bull, *Misericordiae Vultus*, states:

Jesus speaks several times of the importance of faith over and above the observance of the law. It is in this sense that we must understand his words when, reclining at table with Matthew and other tax collectors and sinners, he says to the pharisees raising objections to him, “Go and learn the meaning of ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice.’ I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:13). Faced with a vision of justice as the mere observance of the law that judges people simply by dividing them into

two groups—the just and sinners—Jesus is bent on revealing the great gift of mercy that searches out sinners and offers them pardon and salvation.¹

It Is Extravagant Mercy That I Desire

The goal of this graced “year of favor from the Lord” intended for prodigal sons, older brothers, and everyone in between, is to receive and return the lavish love of our Father of mercies (cf. Lk 15) who does not desire the death of his children, but seeks and showers mercy on the weak and the strong, the good and the bad alike. Mercy will enable us to see what God sees in ourselves and others, especially in the least of our brethren (cf. Mt 25); to hold God’s people in our hearts; to stand in the gap like Christ and Moses



The Return of the Prodigal Son
by Pompeo Batoni (1773)

before him; to intercede for all who choose wrongly and need abundant grace and divine mercy; and to facilitate conversion as we draw people with the cords of love (Hos 11:4) so that “all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth” (1 Tim 2:4).

God is unlike us. God is love, and as St. John Paul II wrote, “Mercy is an indispensable dimension of love; it is as it were love’s second name.”² Christ Crucified for love of sinners was “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). God’s mercy is unthinkable, unimaginable, unfathomable, unprecedented, unexpected, unbeatable, unsurpassable, undeniable, undeserved, unmerited, incomprehensible to some but available for all. Shocking perhaps, but Gospel truth!

Remember Christ’s “scandalous” encounters with the woman caught in adultery, the Samaritan woman at the well, Levi, Zacchaeus, the good thief, Saul, and so many others. Recall the surprising Last Judgment “*you did it to me*” warnings in Matthew 25. Jesus turns the tables on us and makes us look at ourselves, one another, and God in a completely new way as he showers his extravagant mercy on all sinners, from Adam and Eve to the last person standing. His love knows no bounds—nor should ours.

The Cleansing “Whip of Mercy”

Pope Francis, when he wrote to the Grand Chancellor of the Catholic University of Argentina on March 9, 2015, described God’s tender mercy as a “caress” of love, “the very substance of the Gospel of Jesus.”³ On March 6, 2014 he told the priests of Rome that two extremes must be avoided, that of:

a rigorist or a laxist... Neither the laxist nor the rigorist bears witness to Jesus Christ, for neither the one nor the other takes care of the person he encounters. The rigorist washes his hands of them: in fact, he nails the person to the law, understood in a cold and rigid way; and the laxist also washes his hands of them: he is only apparently merciful, but in reality he does not take seriously the problems of that conscience, by minimizing the sin. True mercy *takes the person into one’s care*, listens to him attentively, approaches the situation with respect and truth, and accompanies him on the journey of reconciliation. And this is demanding, yes, certainly.⁴

Two days later, in his Angelus address, Pope Francis described how Jesus cleanses hearts—not with a whip, as he cleansed the temple, but with the *whip of mercy*: “Jesus never strikes. Jesus cleanses with tenderness, with mercy, with love. Mercy is his way of cleansing. Let us allow the Lord to enter with his mercy—to cleanse our hearts. The whip of Jesus with us is mercy. Let us open to him the gates so that He would make us a little cleaner.”⁵ That

evening, he reiterated the consoling invitation: “Ask the Lord...to cleanse your soul. We imagine that He comes with a whip of cords... Do you know what kind of whip Jesus uses to cleanse our soul? Mercy. Open your heart to Jesus’ mercy! Say: ‘Jesus, look how much filth! Come, cleanse. Cleanse with Your mercy, with your tender words, cleanse with your caresses’.”⁶

He also spoke of the first pastoral commandment: closeness to all people, even to those who may have done wrong because even they have hearts and are loved by God: “We cannot go to a family that has sick or hungry children or that has fallen into vice with ‘you must, you must, you must.’ No. We must go with closeness, with the caress that Jesus taught us.”⁷ Here is the key to *this pope of mercy* and this Jubilee of Mercy: to imitate the love and mercy of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the model of mercy. Recounting the parables of mercy in *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis reminds us that we must learn from and imitate God’s extravagantly merciful love. Jesus’ example must move us to merciful action daily. This is the most credible sign that we ourselves have come to know and have received God’s love and mercy and truly have become disciples of mercy and missionaries of mercy. As the beloved disciple John states:

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death... We ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.⁸

Making Mercy A Way of Life – Beyond the Jubilee of Mercy

Pope Francis insists that all the people of God must exhibit his extravagant mercy, which is an urgent medicine for an ailing humanity. That is the goal and desired fruit of this Jubilee of Mercy—and this call for mercy is very much in continuity with his predecessors. Pope Saint John Paul II expressed his desire that “the whole message” of mercy reverberate in our day and age. At the canonization of the apostle of divine mercy, St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, he quoted her: “I feel tremendous pain when I see the sufferings of my neighbors. All my neighbors’ sufferings reverberate in my own heart; I carry their anguish in my heart in such a way that it even physically destroys me. I would like all their sorrows to fall upon me, in order to

relieve my neighbor.” The pilgrim pope of the new evangelization called for widespread mercy as a way of life and explained, “The path of mercy... creates new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings” even if “it is not easy to love with a deep love” and requires an “authentic gift of self”: by becoming one with God’s “fatherly heart we are able to look with new eyes at our brothers and sisters with an attitude of unselfishness and solidarity, of generosity and forgiveness. All this is mercy!”⁹

Pope Benedict XVI also taught that God’s loving mercy in us allows us to look with new eyes at our brothers and sisters and their needs, including their spiritual needs and their need for merciful welcome and forgiveness:

I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern... Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave.¹⁰

On A Mission of Mercy!

The command is clear. Imitating Christ has consequences. St. John warns us of the high cost of being blind with regard to love: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20). Pope Benedict additionally pointed out Jesus’ emphasis in Matthew 25:40, that “Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.”¹¹ He continues:

Love is explicitly demanded. The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor is ... so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbor or hate him altogether ... love of neighbor is a path that leads to the encounter with God ... closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God.¹²

The time is now. We must be instruments, agents, and missionaries of mercy who “receive the charity which flows from (Christ’s) open heart, for ourselves but also for others, and become ‘channels’ of his love and compassion, especially for those who are suffering, discouraged and

alone.”¹³ And we can receive the merciful love of God, especially from the table of the Lord because:

“Worship” itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely... the “commandment” of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given.¹⁴

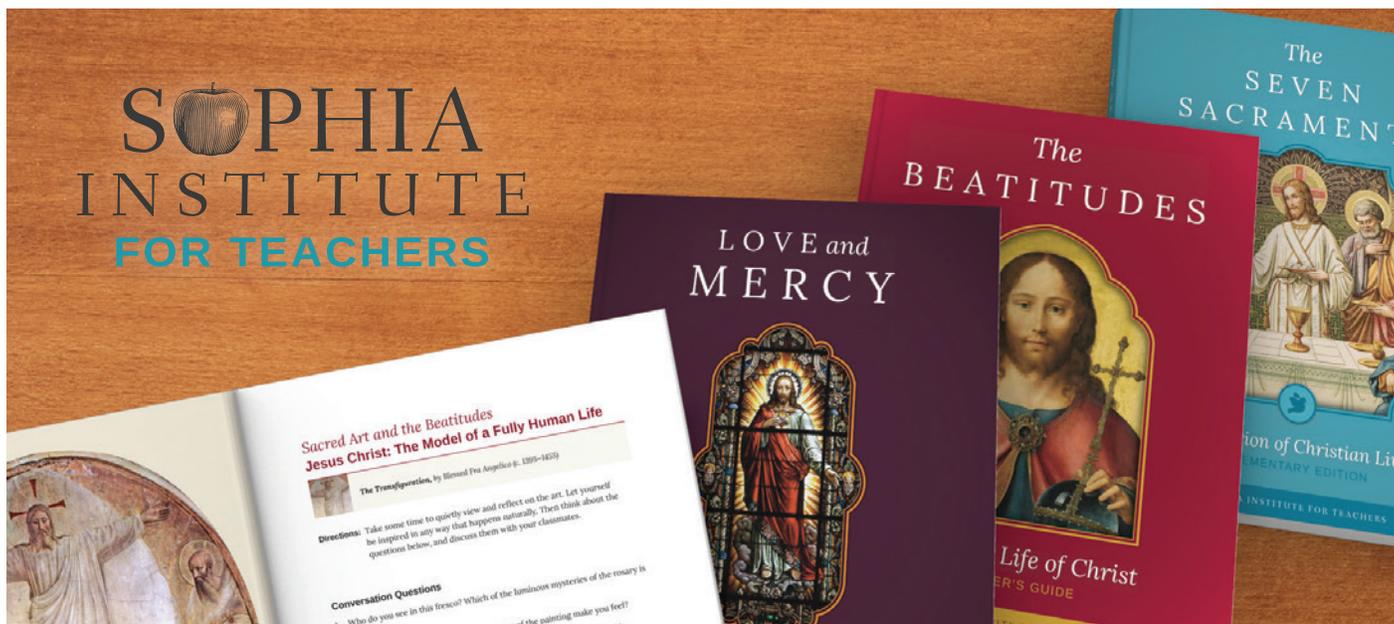
The call is urgent. The stakes are high. The invitation has the name of each of us on it. God is on a mission, a mission of mercy! The Jubilee of Mercy is a spiritual remedy for prodigal sons and hardened older brothers alike, and it is a true path to

encounter and conversion for the whole of humanity. How will each of us respond? What will we do to help ourselves and others be deeply transformed by merciful love?¹⁵ Together “let us allow God to surprise us.”¹⁶

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Notes

- 1 Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, art. 20.
- 2 St. John Paul II, *Drives in Misericordiae*, art. 7.
- 3 <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-sends-letter-for-argentina-university-celebra>
- 4 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/march/documents/papa-francesco_20140306_clero-diocesi-roma.html
- 5 <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-let-us-allow-jesus-to-cleanse-our-hea>
- 6 <http://www.news.va/en/news/pastoral-visit-to-the-roman-parish-santa-maria-mad>
- 7 http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/03/08/pope_francis_open_your_hearts_to_jesus_mercy/1127972
- 8 1 Jn 3:11-20.
- 9 http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000430_faustina.html
- 10 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, art. 18. See also arts. 14-16.
- 11 *Ibid.*, art. 15. See also Mt 22:40.
- 12 *Ibid.*, art. 16.
- 13 Pope Francis, Homily at Canonization Mass for Blesseds Vincenzo Grossi, Maria dell’Immacolata Concezione, Ludovico Martin and Maria Azelia Guérin, Oct. 18, 2015 at <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/full-text-pope-s-homily-for-canonization-mass>.
- 14 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, art. 14.
- 15 Find a useful summary and study guide for *Misericordiae Vultus* at iEvangelize.wordpress.com.
- 16 Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, art. 25.



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Inspired THROUGH Art

The Beauty of Mercy:

*A manuscript illumination from the medieval **Bedford Hours***

By Linus Meldrum

How can we understand mercy? When mercy flows, it washes away time and place. Mercy is a mystery that springs from the heart and contains a borderless charity that does not point at the sinner nor to sin; instead, mercy restores unity. According to St. John Paul the Great, mercy also removes any hierarchy between subject and object. In his encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia* (Richness in Mercy), he writes that mercy does not set the forgiving person against the one being forgiven; rather, mercy creates a destination to which all may arrive and invites the participants into this place of restoration. Our participation in this boundless quality of mercy is an outcome of divine grace, outpoured upon us as a result of the Paschal Mystery; it helps us to grow in holiness and be more like our merciful Father, the Author of mercy.

Historical Background

This image is a page from a book that has come to be known as the *Bedford Hours*, an early 15th century illuminated manuscript form of a “book of hours”—a devotional book of prayers and meditations set to the readings in the *Daily Office* or *Liturgy of the Hours*. We don’t know who commissioned this *Bedford Hours*, but it took its name from the Duke of Bedford, John of Lancaster, when his wife Anne of Burgundy purchased it for him sometime after their marriage in 1423. Recent scholars believe that the “Bedford School,” a group of artists, produced the book. The “Bedford School” included one anonymous master called “the Bedford Master,” who produced this crucifixion, which accompanies the prayers for the Hour of *None*, the ninth hour or 3:00 PM. The book took many years to become what we see today.

As grief-filled as the drama was that day in Jerusalem, the moments were also filled with the richness of Mercy.

The image, as many illuminations found in the late medieval period, contains figurative scenes, enlarged and complex letters, carefully executed lines of text, and elaborate border decoration. The artist uses an entire banquet of visual forms: banderoles, which are unfurling banners that provide spaces for dialogue text, especially the last words of Jesus; roundels, which are small openings with supporting scenes of other moments from the Passion; elaborate capital letters, such as the “D” to start the words *Deus* and *Domine* and the “O” to start *O God* and *O Lord*; as well as expansive marginalia filled with lavish decoration.

The term “decoration,” however, minimizes the role of these additional elements of design and composition. A more proper term might be “ornament”: that is, a structured visual accompaniment to the main narrative. The concept of adding these marginalia is profound. Isn’t the crucifixion a scene of horror and grief? Why are there beautiful flowers, spreading vines, and intense color?

This combination of apparent tragedy and apparent light-heartedness urges us toward realizing the paradox of the cross. As grief-filled as the drama was that day in Jerusalem, the moments were also filled with the richness of Mercy. By contemplating this illuminated setting for the scene, we may begin to understand the beauty that was poured out upon us that day. The stark contrast between the crucifixion and the colorful surroundings delivers a message: embrace the sorrow now, but soon joy will surround and transform grief.

The largest text at the center of the page is from Psalm 70, in which the psalmist expresses his longing for salvation. We begin each Hour of the *Divine Office* by reciting this verse from the Psalm aloud:

Eus in adiutorium
 meum intende.
Domine ad
 adiuuandum me festina.



Contre nee leigneur sic mis ou il souffry mort et passion poue nous tous: et sont es rollaues en tout luy
 toutes les paroles quel parla en la croix. Come il y euinta et la croix d'ambles. et les mors exultant de leur robes

Deus in adiutorium meum intende. Domine ad adiuuandum me festina.

O God, make speed to save me. O lord, make haste to help me.

Praying with the mind of the psalmist, the reader can see this scene of Christ's sacrifice as a culminating moment of deliverance and the answer to the psalmist's plea.

Figures of Mercy

In the main panel, the figures include: God the Father, who receives Christ's sacrifice; Mary, who deeply participates in the pain and sorrow of Jesus; the supporting women of Jerusalem; and Longinus, who holds the spear that pierced the side of Jesus. The roundels contain narratives from the Gospel that took place in the time just before the crucifixion. Caiaphas, an architect of the plot to kill Jesus, points and says, "*expedit ut unus moriatur pro populo*", which means: "it is expedient that one (man) die for the people" (Jn 11:49). Paradoxically, this was a true prophecy: Jesus did die for many, but not in the way Caiaphas intended. We also see the soldiers disrobing Jesus, preparing the cross, and nailing Jesus to the cross; and with the roundel in the lower right, we see a hint of the power of God that will be fully revealed in the Resurrection: holy ones come out of the grave as Jesus dies on the cross (Mt 52-53).

Jesus was not the only dying figure at the crucifixion. We read in Luke 23:39-43 about the two other men who also died that day. We see in this part of the drama the reckoning of two robbers who had made unlawful choices in their lives. At the last moment, one man challenged Jesus to save himself and rescue them. Isn't that what messiahs are for? The other thief rebuked his fellow criminal and then called out to Jesus as a Savior. In the image, this thief stretches his neck to be closer to Jesus. His petition acknowledges the truth of the moment and, at the same time, honors Christ. These are the narrative elements of mercy. By asking in faith for a chance to participate in the life of Christ, the good criminal moved into the light of reconciliation. This is an extraordinary part of the story, so small and apart from the cast of central characters. This moment of mercy and forgiveness has given the man, sometimes known as Dismas, the unique title of the "Good Thief." In the image, above and below the penitent thief in two of the banderoles we read Christ's response in Latin – "*amen dico tibi hodie mecum / eris in paradiso*," which means: "Amen, I say to thee, today thou wilt be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43).

The crucifixion of the *Bedford Hours* moves us from darkness and horror into the glory of a supernatural garden of forms. Similarly, the seismic conversion and reconciliation of Dismas confirms the beauty of divine mercy: it is never too late and the sin is never too great.



Banderoles: These banner-like receptacles for words are the forerunners of text bubbles in comics and cartoons of today



Roundels: These small apertures fitted into the page allow glimpses of scenes from different times and places



Capitals: Manuscript Illumination often made use of large letterforms that gained distinctive identities as the capital letters are covered and filled with extremely lavish ornament



Marginalia: The flora and fauna that fill the margins express both the artists' visual imagination and observances of the natural world. The natural vining and twisting growth of vegetation is ordered by an interest in intuitive geometry, which displays symmetry, balance, progressive patterns, and relationships of scale.

Linus Meldrum is Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Franciscan University where he teaches the core curriculum course, Visual Arts and the Catholic Imagination and courses in studio art. (Banderole Translations courtesy of Dr. Richard Smith.)

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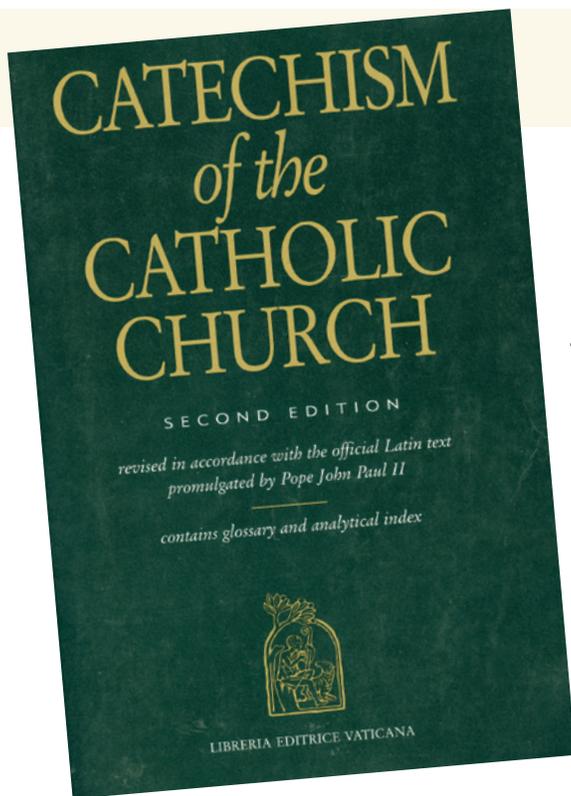
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LESSON PLANNING

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CATECHISM,



PART 1

By Petroc Willey

The Catechism is an outstanding teaching tool that can provide excellent guidance for our lesson and session planning.

The crucial element in any planning is first to become clear about the aim and then about the intended outcomes of a lesson. This is the subject of the current article.

Focus on the Center

The overall goal of all catechetical activity—and therefore of every resource, every program, and each individual catechetical encounter—has been famously described in *Catechesi Tradendae*, St. John Paul II's seminal teaching on catechesis:

“the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ.”¹

This articulation that Christ is the central aim of catechesis is a rich and inclusive one, which points in several directions. As we ponder the meaning of this teaching, we can call to mind all the nuances of the term “Christ-centered,” as it is unfolded in the *General Directory for Catechesis*.² Thus, in our catechetical work, we are helping others to find Christ; and finding Christ includes *finding him in all of his relationships*. When we find Christ, we find, at the same time, those whom he loves. He would not have it otherwise. He does not allow us to find him alone, isolated, as some barren *sola Christi*. His names and titles reveal as much: he is “Jesus,” “God saves”—a name pointing us simultaneously upwards towards the Persons of the Trinity and downwards to those whom he redeems and lifts from the misery

of their sin; he is “Son,” a name that identifies a relationship, and reminds us of his heavenly Father, who is his source; he is also “Christ,” that is, the one anointed by the eternal Spirit.

To speak of the aim of our catechetical work as putting people “in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ” therefore entails, as St. John Paul II put it, leading others “to the love of the Father in the Spirit” in order to “make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.”³ A christocentric aim, furthermore, necessarily implies a *Trinitarian* christocentricity.⁴

Christocentricity is also to be understood in terms of what the Tradition has called the “whole Christ,” *Christus totus*. The Church uses this phrase to remind us that Christ is Head and members together, forming one Body. Jesus is not found apart from those whom he disciples; or, according to a parallel image, Christ is inseparable from his Bride, for whom he gave himself up and to whom he united himself in everlasting love. The Scriptures speak of the bride’s longing for her groom, which is a longing for that union that marks the end of earthly time, when Christ finally unites to himself, in the embrace of love, all whom the Father, throughout history, has drawn to himself through the Son in the Holy Spirit.⁵ Christ is the living heart of the Father’s plan for creation and redemption.

The *Catechism* provides catechists with this rich christocentric account at the heart of its annunciation of the faith. Every part, and each chapter and section, has been written in order to lead us to this center, revealing “in the Person of Christ the whole of God’s eternal design reaching fulfillment in that Person.”⁶ When planning lessons, then, we can turn to the *Catechism* in confident trust that we will find there a Christ-centered presentation of material.

A fourfold approach

When we turn to the question of the subsidiary goals of catechesis, the *Catechism* assists us by ensuring that we structure our teaching in terms of a *fourfold task*. As the *General Directory for Catechesis* explains, it is precisely by means of these “diverse, interrelated tasks”⁷ that we achieve our central aim. If we teach faithfully to these objectives, we allow our audience to find and embrace Christ in all of the riches of his grace and work.

We can set these individual tasks, as learning objectives, on a simple grid with four headings that correspond to each of the four parts of the *Catechism*: faith professed, faith celebrated, faith lived, and faith prayed. Consciously attending to outcomes in each of these areas ensures that our students receive a comprehensive and balanced catechesis in each lesson. Each lesson will be grounded in doctrine, centered on the liturgy, suited to life, and prayerful; moreover, our teaching will have been securely built and developed in the light of the pillars of the faith.⁸

These four dimensions can be presented on a large scale, in terms of a program or resource, and many curricula now structure their programs and catechetical resources according to these four dimensions and following the pattern of the *Catechism*. Thus we can find blocks of lessons dedicated to explaining the Creed, the sacraments, and so on. This large-scale structural planning is one obvious way to ensure that these essential tasks of catechesis are suitably represented. If the *Catechism* were to have offered us nothing except for a reminder of these essential elements, it would already have provided significant assistance to catechesis, guarding us against the development of partial or unbalanced curricula.

The *Catechism* provides more than this kind of assistance in large-scale planning, however. It can help us to plan individual lessons in the same way. It is very helpful for our students if we allow the *Catechism* to guide us into presenting these smaller segments and units of our teaching with a fourfold set of outcomes. In this way, we can communicate, on a more regular basis, a holistic understanding and experience of the faith and can more effectively emphasize the integration of the four dimensions.

The simplest way in which to plan individual lessons in this way is to begin by reviewing the topic in whichever part of the *Catechism* it appears; thus, for instance, the Church’s teaching on heaven in the succinct treatment it receives in the exposition on the Creed.⁹ Once we have derived our key teaching points and learning outcomes from this short section (in this case, identifying the key doctrinal points) we can turn to develop the other dimensions. The *Catechism* provides us with two aids for this work:

Numerous cross-references in the margin of the text (numbers found at the end of a sentence referring to other paragraphs that deal with the same theme), as well as the analytical index at the end of the volume, allow the reader to view each theme in its relationship with the entirety of the faith.¹⁰

We find the first point of assistance that the *Catechism* provides in the *cross-references*. These can be plotted onto the fourfold grid we have created, so that we can easily see which references correspond to each of the parts of the *Catechism*. We are then enabled to identify possible outcomes related to these different parts of the *Catechism*.

In the example we have taken, of the portion in the *Catechism* on heaven, several of the cross-references take us to other passages in the first, doctrinal, part (CCC pars. 163, 260, 326, 668, 793, 954, 956, 959, 1011); some lead us to the area of moral formation (CCC pars. 1718, 1720, 1722) and one to the part of the *Catechism* on prayer (CCC par. 2794). We can develop objectives related to these areas.¹¹ We will quickly see that none of the cross-references lead us to the liturgical and sacramental part of the *Catechism*. Clearly, we will wish to have learning outcomes in this

area of the celebration of the Christian mystery. In order to derive these in a way that allows us to continue to be guided by the *Catechism*, we can therefore look for “second level” cross-references, that is, outcomes derived from those passages to which the initial cross-references lead us. So, for instance, we might note that from CCC par. 956, which concerns the intercession of the saints, we are led to CCC par. 1370 on the eschatological dimension of the Mass.

The second area of assistance in developing a holistic catechesis for each of our lessons is the *subject index*. This subject index can help us to expand and develop key areas. The entry under “heaven” itself is useful, but relatively short; and in this case, we may decide that we have already gleaned our main points from the cross-references. We may decide, however, that for the learning outcomes related to the third part of the *Catechism*, on life in Christ, we need more help in developing our teaching on the nature of “Christian beatitude.” Here the subject index will provide us with some additional references and also point us to connected and relevant themes that will fill out our teaching: for example, we are recommended to examine also the nature of the beatific vision.

These two elements in the *Catechism*, then, are outstanding aids for any catechist. They offer specific guidance into providing lessons that are balanced in content and support

those whom we teach in grasping the beautifully coordinated and integrated nature of Christian doctrine and life.

Dr. Petroc Willey is Professor of Catechetics at Franciscan University and Reader in the New Evangelization at the School of the Annunciation, England. He is a Consultant for the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.

Notes

- 1 *Catechesi Tradendae*, art. 5. This passage is quoted in the *Catechism* par. 426, in the section on the Person of Christ, where the christocentricity of catechesis is outlined and affirmed.
- 2 *General Directory for Catechesis*, arts. 98-100.
- 3 CT, art. 5.
- 4 See GDC, art. 99.
- 5 For these dimensions of christocentricity in the *Catechism* see pars. 759-769 and 795-796.
- 6 CT art. 5. For examples and further explanation of how the *Catechism* develops this christocentric presentation see Petroc Willey, Pierre de Gointet and Barbara Morgan, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Craft of Catechesis* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2008), 52-54.
- 7 GDC, art. 84. See also the *General Catechetical Directory* (1971), arts. 21-29, and cf. CCC par. 3.
- 8 See CCC pars. 13-17. The *General Directory for Catechesis* describes these dimensions as “fundamental tasks of catechesis” in art. 85, writing about them from the point of view of the work of the catechist: promoting knowledge of the faith; liturgical education; moral formation, and teaching to pray.
- 9 CCC, pars. 1023-1029.
- 10 CCC, par. 18.
- 11 In the case of the doctrinal part we will probably develop some overarching objectives, encompassing a number of the references.

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Noëlle Le Duc and Her Pedagogy: Serving the Child's Act of Faith

Part 2

By Waltraud Linnig

Noëlle Le Duc, while looking for ways to awaken the faith in young children, identified two important aspects of catechetical pedagogy. We shall use the terms, "fidelity to man and fidelity to God."¹

Fidelity to Man

The first aspect, fidelity to man, leads us to ask, *how do we address children?* In order to answer this question, we must take several points into consideration. First, we must remember that the human capacities of the children are still limited; in order to receive and adhere to the Word of God, they need to learn self-control, silence, how to listen, and so on. Young children, moreover, are still close to God, who is their origin and their Creator. Children are also innocent, although, like all of us, they are still marked by original sin. Finally, religious education must also consider that every child is unique and free.

Noëlle Le Duc was not a scholar, but she was given a strong pedagogical and catechetical charism. Her practical pedagogy is not a result of academic research but is the fruit of her personal experience, enriched by the efforts of a group of educators and elementary school teachers. Her experience aligns with the research done by specialists in psychology, pedagogy, and children's catechesis. These specialists helped her take into account all the aspects of the child's education and to elucidate the particular aspects of her own pedagogy.

For example, Noëlle Le Duc would refer to Maria Montessori, who described the great receptivity of children aged three to six years old as the "the absorbent mind." Children are also able to remain in silence and to recollect themselves in the presence of God, as Hélène Lubienska de Lenwal explained in her writings. This Montessori educator said that young children could be compared to contemplatives:

[My] observations obliged me to recognize that lots of children are naturally contemplative. If their capacity for attention is not developed, it is because they lacked the favorable conditions. It must be the same in the order of grace.²



Noëlle Le Duc deepened de Lenwal's observation concerning grace. She observed that in her experience, children are able to receive supernatural contemplation and that it is possible to educate them to prepare themselves and to conform to the gift of contemplation when God offers it.

Noëlle Le Duc was also inspired by the writings of Marie Fargues, who outlined the basic elements of religious education for children: the importance of an atmosphere full of trust, the witness of the teachers' faith, and the use

of engaging methods. Fargues observed that religious education that seeks to bring others to a personal and free encounter with God really needs an engaging pedagogy.³ Noëlle Le Duc emphasized, in contrast to Fargues, that the child's activity is actually closely dependent on God's activity and that in prayer and in the dialogue of loving faith between God and the child, God has the first place. Le Duc stressed that faith is always a response to the gift of God and is sustained by him. She further explained that the child's activity is even more sustained by grace than an adult's because they have a simpler and purer heart. The human faculties of children are also not yet fully developed, so they are almost never a hindrance to supernatural activity. Children have to learn to act with their human capacities in order to receive and to conform themselves more and more to the action of grace coming from God.

Fidelity to God

We come now to the second important aspect of Noëlle Le Duc's pedagogy, fidelity to God—its particular strength compared to other practical pedagogies known during her time. She claimed that, in the case of very young children, the teacher's action should be directed, not to the intelligence of the children, but to the Holy Spirit himself, dwelling within each child. The Holy Spirit has been at work in us since our baptism in order to make of us children of God.⁴ Her approach corresponds to a fundamental teaching of the Christian faith: that God's action is primary.⁵ The

Holy Spirit is “a teacher within, who, in the secret of the conscience and the heart, makes one understand what one has heard but was not capable of grasping.”⁶

Consequently, in order to receive integral catechetical instruction in the faith, children especially need to know how to encounter God. By helping children get into the habit of prayer and following the interior impulse that draws them to the Holy Spirit, we facilitate and enrich this encounter. Noëlle Le Duc gives us the profound reason for this:

It is the Holy Spirit in the child who enables him to go beyond the exterior formulations of faith, and to reach the “gold of the substance” within. A conclusion immediately follows: “Prayer and a living experience of God precede and sustain all forms of catechesis.”⁷

Because young children are open and trusting, God can easily reveal himself to them and act in their favor. We can now pose some questions: *How does God work in*

Conference in 2006, defines the Christian “experience of God” by linking these two aspects: genuine contact with the reality of God and an inner personal reception of this reality by the human person.⁹ Christian experience is a living knowledge of the mystery of God that produces a new life with God. Irreducible to purely subjective experience, the experience of God brings us back to the objective deposit of faith. Pope Benedict XVI, then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, underlined this principle in his well-known teaching, entitled “Sources and transmission of the faith,” given in 1983 in the context of the catechetical crisis in France.¹⁰

Furthermore, the “experience of God” is an experience of God’s transcendent mystery, in which some experiences of faith remain unconscious and we become aware of them only through seeing their effects in our lives. For example, in her Christmas 1886 conversion, St. Therese of Lisieux was not aware of the grace she had received during Mass but became aware of it later, in the staircase at home. There



the human person? What is God doing in us? Are there some constant aspects of his action? Is it possible to attract his action? Noëlle Le Duc’s practical pedagogy seeks to favor God’s action in the child and then to educate the child to correspond to God. This pedagogy parallels the rich writings and teachings of Venerable Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus.⁸ This fidelity to God leads the child to enter into an authentic *experience of God*.

Noëlle Le Duc’s pedagogy presupposes a correct understanding of what an “experience of God” exactly is. What do we mean when we say “religious experience” or “Christian experience”? The *National Text for the Orientation of Catechesis in France*, published by the French Bishops’

she discovered that she was able to react differently to her father’s impatient remark. She realized the effects of grace; her inner transformation had already been accomplished. We see that the “experience of God” is mysterious. Noëlle Le Duc’s pedagogy strives to bring children to an experience of faith that respects God’s mystery, his will of salvation, the personal grace of each person, the way God acts with each person in the history of salvation, God’s freedom, and our free response to God. In a catechetical course, the child learns to respect all aspects of the divine mystery. He can learn not to reduce his own experience of God to what he feels or to what he is conscious of. The act of faith welcomes God’s mysterious action, which we can

neither feel, nor hear, nor see. The child learns to follow God's mysterious and invisible action in his or her heart without feeling it and, at the same time, to live a personal relationship with God in prayer and all throughout the day. Even a young child can attain these depths of faith.

How can we assure the integrality of faith? Not by teaching quantities of "truths," but by teaching the fundamental truth of faith. This means that, by first giving a simple knowledge of faith, you can help children adhere to the whole mystery of God. *Porta Fidei* affirms this:

Knowledge of faith opens a door into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God. The giving of assent implies that, when we believe, we freely accept the whole mystery of faith, because the guarantor of its truth is God who reveals himself and allows us to know his mystery of love.¹¹

According to Noëlle Le Duc, a three-year-old child is not yet able to give a personal assent to God; at that age, children are simply carried by the faith and the prayer of their parents. A four or five-year-old child can receive an initial simple teaching concerning God's love and enter into personal prayer. "Turning one's mind and heart to God is already prayer," she says.¹² The child is even able to understand that God is "Spirit." Noëlle Le Duc explains:

The disposition to find God "in spirit" from the beginning of the child's spiritual life on, constitutes for the child an essential and living foundation. The child is rooted in God, in the invisible God, and God Himself will accompany the child's growth. God's presence will be in the center of the child's whole future.¹³

Six-year-olds can progressively deepen their knowledge of God and their prayer. The catechetical curriculum proposes the same stages each year so that the children's progress according to their age can be compared to a spiral,¹⁴ which takes up the previous stages, and deepens them according to the gradual growth of the children.

In 1978, Noëlle Le Duc started publishing the results of her experience in several books, which spread knowledge of her practical pedagogy, first in France, then in other countries (Lithuania, Hungary, Lebanon, Senegal, Canada, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Spain, etc.) where she gave formation sessions for catechists. The contact with other cultural and ecclesial sensitivities, as well as with people of different Christian denominations, verified the soundness and the universality of this spiritual formation for children. Indeed, Le Duc's method works with children because it is extremely simple and centered on the essential.

As Le Duc's students grew up, their parents asked the catechists to continue their children's spiritual faith formation and to prepare them for their First Confession and

First Communion.¹⁵ Others requested that their children be prepared for Baptism with the same practical pedagogy.¹⁶ It became necessary to continue the Christian formation for children aged seven to eleven years old¹⁷—which is the origin for the *Come Follow Me* program—and to adapt Noëlle Le Duc's books for young children to the new situations of the present.¹⁸ The work of adapting and developing this practical pedagogy continues today—along with the deeper theological and academic reflection on catechesis that takes place at the Studium of Notre Dame de Vie in Venasque, France.

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Notes

- 1 This is a phrase from the French catechetical theorist, Joseph Columb. Cf. Gilbert Adler et Gérard Vogeleisen, *Un siècle de catéchèses en France : Histoire – Déplacements – Enjeux* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 201.
- 2 Hélène Lubienka de Lenval, *Le Silence: A l'ombre de la Parole*, Collection Bible et Vie Chrétienne (Casterman, 1955, 1965), 90-91.
- 3 Cf. Marie Fargues, *La Formation religieuse des enfants*, in COLLECTIF, *Au seuil de la théologie: Initiation en trois années, Premier degré* (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 403. See also Rose-Marie de Casabianca, *L'Enfant capable de Dieu: Développement psychologique, éveil spirituel avant trois ans* (Fayard, 1988).
- 4 Noëlle Le Duc, *La découverte du mystère trinitaire dès l'enfance*, dans COLLECTIF, *Transmettre la foi: A la lumière du Catéchisme de l'Eglise Catholique – Rencontre spirituelle et théologique*, 1993 (Venasque: Édition du Carmel, 1994), 294.
- 5 Cf. *Dei Verbum*, art. 5.
- 6 Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, art. 72. *Catechesi Tradendae* continues: "Catechesis, which is growth in faith and the maturing of Christian life towards its fullness, is consequently a work of the Holy Spirit, a work that He alone can initiate and sustain in the Church."
- 7 Noëlle Le Duc, *La rencontre avec Dieu dès la petite enfance*, unpublished lecture given in Lyon, January 1979.
- 8 Cf. P. Marie-Eugène de l'Enfant-Jésus, OCD, *Je veux voir Dieu*, 9^e éd. (Toulouse: Éditions du Carmel, 2014).
- 9 The text also emphasizes the ecclesial character of the Christian experience. Cf. *Texte national pour l'orientation de la catéchèse en France et principes d'organisation* [National Text for the Orientation of Catechesis in France and Principles of Organization] (Paris: Coédition Bayard/Centurion/Fleurus-Mame/Cerf, 2006), 63-64.
- 10 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Sources and transmission of the faith," in *Communio* 10, No. 1 (Spring 1983): 17-34.
- 11 Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, art. 10.
- 12 Noëlle Le Duc, *La découverte...*, *op. cit.*, 300.
- 13 Noëlle Le Duc, *La rencontre avec Dieu...*, *op. cit.*
- 14 This is an important idea of Joseph Colomb.
- 15 Cf. Maguy Bagnol, *Je veux demeurer chez toi* (Venasque: Éditions du Carmel, 1990).
- 16 Cf. Suzette Lacombe, *Tu seras pour moi un fils* (Venasque: Éditions du Carmel, 1997).
- 17 Benoit Caulle and Anne-Marie Le Bourhis published four books between 2007 and 2012 in the Collection *Come Follow Me* with a little guide for catechists [*Petit guide du catéchiste*] (Éditions du Jubilé, 2007).
- 18 Cf. Véronique Tellène, *Enfants louez Dieu* [Children, Praise God], Collection *Come and Follow Me* (Éditions du Jubilé, 2011).

ACQUIRING THE FATHER'S EYES:

THE *Spirituality* OF THE *Catechist*

By Elizabeth Siegel

What is the most important element in the catechetical process? Is it the doctrine to be passed on? Is it the method one employs? Is it the catechist's preparation or the ability to adapt to the age and culture of the students? These are all essential, as the *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us. These elements, however, depend on one indispensable and often overlooked factor: the spirituality of the catechist. Why is this so? Unlike subjects in the arts and sciences, the Christian faith cannot be adequately passed on unless the catechist *lives* that faith—unless it has penetrated his very being and transformed him from within. When this happens, he is no longer merely a teacher, but a living witness to something beyond himself. Like John the Baptist, he points to another, to the Lamb of God. The *Guide for Catechists*, a wonderful document about catechesis in mission territories, puts it this way: “The work of catechists involves their whole being. Before they preach the Word they must make it their own and live by it. The world... needs evangelizers who speak of a God they know and who is familiar to them, as if they saw the Invisible.”¹ The catechist, in fact, invites those he catechizes to share in the communion he himself has with Christ as a member of his body, the Church. Echoing St. John's words in his first epistle, catechists can say: what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, “that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:1-3).

A catechist does not merely impart a body of knowledge, therefore; his catechesis “form[s] the personality of the believer.”² The catechist offers his students an “apprenticeship of the entire Christian life.”³ The students will acquire from him a way of being, an attitude, a way of relating to the world. Those who have children know that they are deeply affected not only by the content of the words we speak, but by how we speak those words, by how we act, and by our attitudes, in a word, by how we live. *Who am I?*

What gives me joy? What do I love? How do I respond to weakness, to poverty, to sickness, to sin? How do I look at other people in the world? All these fundamental attitudes are conveyed when we catechize. Do our students learn from us what it means to be a Christian?

A profound example of the spirituality of the catechist

During my graduate studies in theology, I met a remarkable woman named Margaret Turek, whom I consider a quintessential teacher of the faith. She taught me how to be a catechist in my very first assignment, and much more: she taught me what it means to be a Christian. When Margaret taught, she spoke from prayer, and in a spirit of prayer. When she spoke of the Paschal Mystery, for example, she would

turn to the crucifix on the wall and you sensed by her voice that she was glorifying her crucified Lord as she spoke. When she taught of the love of the Father, her words revealed an intimacy with him: she had known his mercy, his accompanying love, and providential care in her life. In the way she taught doctrine, Margaret introduced me



St. John the Baptist
by Leonardo da Vinci (c. 1513-16)

to a posture—one might say, to the fundamental posture: of adoration and surrender, the posture of faith, hope, and love. She taught me, especially through the Gospels and the lives of the saints, to look at the world differently, that is, to look at all things through God's eyes. When Jesus looked at the poor widow putting two small coins in the temple treasury, why did he see something different than his disciples or other onlookers? Because Jesus, as a popular Christian song put it, had "the Father's eyes." As catechists, we are called to acquire the Father's eyes. Then we will pass on to our students the way of seeing, the way of judging, the way of discerning God's action in our world, which is unique to the Christian faith.

When I brought to Margaret a concern about my family, or a problem in the world at large, she helped me to recognize "God's footprints," that is, how God was involved and what he was calling me to, and, most important of all, how the cross can be embraced as the way to life. Though she was well educated and wise, Margaret often said that when she taught, she was just "emptying her pockets," that is, giving us her "two coins," which represented all she had (Mk 12:41-44). God never fails to bless the dynamic of giving all we have. We offer our five loaves and two fish, God blesses them, and they are more than sufficient—they are superabundant (Cf. Lk 9:10-17 and parallels).

As Margaret taught me—and we spent hours discussing this—God blesses this dynamic because it is the dynamic of the Trinitarian life itself. Receiving all from the Father, his very substance (being), the Son in return gives back all to the Father (his very self), and this mutual self-gift constitutes the Spirit. The Gospel of John reveals this same logic (a kind of "theo-logic," echoing Hans Urs von Balthasar) at work in the mission of the Son on earth. Jesus says of his ministry and teachings: "all that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15) and "I do only what I see the Father doing (5:19). Jesus knows that the Father holds nothing back: "The Father shows him all that he himself is doing" (5:20), and Jesus responds with the complete giving of himself back to the Father on the cross, for the sake of the world. Here we see the posture of the Son before the Father: receiving all from Him, totally dependent on Him in his mission, and giving all back to Him. If we, in our ministry as catechists, take up this form, this posture, this way of being, our students will see in us the posture of the only Begotten Son; they will see in us the person of Jesus, and they will know the Father. "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

Gradually, as I came to know Margaret, I realized that her witness as a teacher flowed from a deep spirituality and from many years of formation as a disciple of the Lord. She could pray while she taught because she

had encountered the Lord through many years of prayer. She could teach us how God saw things because she had spent years pondering the Lord's words and deeds in the Gospels, and discovering how the saints lived according to his ways. Her witness was humble, because she had let the Lord uproot pride in her soul and had discovered her radical dependence on him.

I learned then that I must look to my own relationship with God as the source of my mission as a catechist. Even preparing the lesson can be a privileged moment of encounter with him. Imitating the Son, I open myself to the Spirit, becoming docile to receive what the Father wants me to say. Margaret encouraged me to reflect on what God had revealed to me that past week—in my prayer, in my reading, and in my encounters—and to discover there a few precious gems that he wanted me in turn to pass on to my students. Viewed from this lens, the ministry of catechesis becomes an adventure between me and God. As the lesson approaches, I ask: how will he lead me to imitate him this week, and to share what he has revealed so that I may bear fruit in him? He is loving me in new ways as I prepare and teach the lesson. Once the session is over, Margaret counseled, we must leave the results to him. We but scatter the seed; we do not need to know how or when it comes to fruition (cf. Mk 4:26-8). Like Jesus, we do not lay claim to the work we have done; we are always aware that "My teaching is not my own, but his who sent me" (Jn. 7:16). Margaret would often quote Matthew 6:3: "Don't let the right hand know what the left hand is doing." It is not another's compliments that I need, but only the peace and blessing that comes from having done the will of my Father. For unlike the Pharisees who seek their glory from others (Jn 5:44), Jesus says, "I do not seek my own glory...it is my father who glorifies me" (Jn 8:50).

Margaret exemplified for me the vocation of the catechist to holiness. Every Christian is called to holiness by virtue of baptism. Those who form other Christians, however, have "a new and special motivation for holiness."⁴ The true catechist—the one who by her very presence invites others into a deeper communion with God—is the saint.⁵

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Notes

- 1 Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Guide for Catechists*, art. 8.
- 2 Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, art. 33.
- 3 *Ibid.*, art. 67.
- 4 *Guide for Catechists*, art. 6.
- 5 *Ibid.*

Using the Divine Pedagogy To Form Catholic Conscience in Children and Youth

By Joseph White

The values of secular society are increasingly divergent from those of our Catholic Faith. We live in a time that seems to fit St. Paul's description of a people who are "ingenious in their wickedness" (Rom 1:30). The task of forming Catholic conscience in children and youth might at times seem impossible in today's world, and we might be tempted to despair. Indeed, no human methodology could accomplish this task. "For human beings this is impossible, but for God, all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

Catechesis, in the mind of the Church, however, is not rooted in human methodology, but in the pedagogy of God. It is the Church's mission to be a "visible and actual continuation of the pedagogy of the Father and of the Son."¹ How can we as catechists use the divine pedagogy, the way God teaches, to form the consciences of our learners? Here are five ways, corresponding to five aspects of the pedagogy of God.

Invite the learners to be their best selves.

The pedagogy of God is invitational and person-centered. Jesus invited his followers into relationship with him (and continues to do so today). He often saw potential in people that they did not see in themselves. Consider St. Peter, for example, who tells Jesus to go away, saying he, Peter, is "a sinful man" (Lk 5:8). But Jesus sees what Peter could be, what he was *made* to be. While we might think many different things will make us happy, the only true and lasting happiness is found in each becoming the person God created that person to be.

One way we can mirror the invitational and person-centered pedagogy of God is by considering the developmental needs of the learner. Developmental theorists such as Lawrence Kohlberg² and James Fowler³ help us to understand how children, teens, and adults grow in their capacity for moral reasoning. It is our responsibility as catechists to not only meet our learners where they are but also to call them to an increasingly deeper understanding

of right and wrong, while helping them to foster virtues and put them into practice.

Help your learners put faith into action.

The pedagogy of God is incarnational. Morality in the Christian life is not about simply following a list of "do's" and "don'ts." It is about following a person, Jesus Christ. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus calls us to a higher standard than the one outlined in Mosaic law. His standard involves conforming our hearts to the will of God;

and our lives change when our hearts change. Help your learners begin to see how following the heart of Jesus will change the way they make choices about what actions to take while at home, at school, in the parish, and in the community.

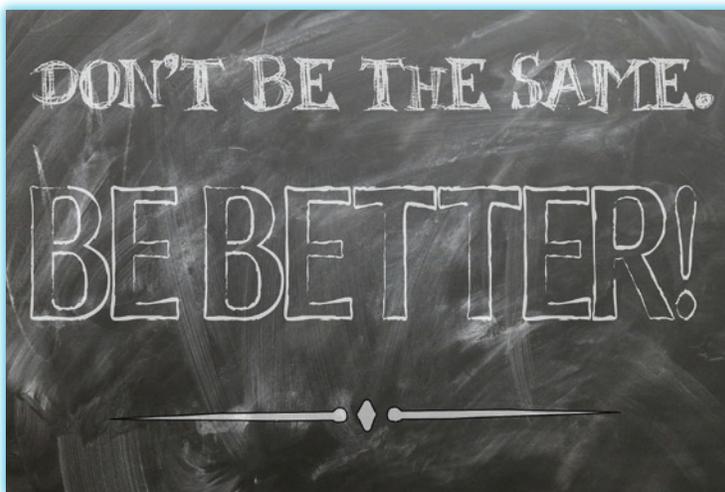
Make sure that every lesson, about any aspect of the faith, also includes suggested ways in which your learners can live that which they have received.

Some useful questions for catechists to ask might include: How does this aspect of the faith change how we live? What can we do differently this week to help God's Word take root in our lives? Role-play good decision making by giving your learners a moral dilemma, and then asking them to "act out" how they would follow Jesus when faced with this situation. Never have learners role-play a bad decision, even for the sake of contrast, because, essentially, we tend to do what we practice.

Build a strong sense of community.

The pedagogy of God is communal and familial. Jesus, knowing that we need to encourage and challenge one another to live the path of discipleship, sent out his disciples two-by-two. A wealth of research shows that we tend to become more like the people we spend time with. Include activities that build connections and fellowship between your learners and their families.

Education for community life is one of the six fundamental tasks of catechesis discussed in the *General Directory*



for *Catechesis*.⁴ This task includes forming learners to understand what it means to be part of a Christian community: how we are called to encourage, challenge, and care for one another. One principle with particular implications for moral decision-making is care for the *common good*, or the good of all. Consideration of the common good is strikingly different from decision making based on the “greater good.” The latter is a utilitarian concept that leads some to justify sacrificing the few for the good of the many. In contrast, moral reasoning based on the common good says that the good of the most vulnerable must be protected. When we promote the common good, we exercise a particular concern for those who are weak or marginalized.

Teach principles and methods for moral decision-making.

The pedagogy of God is structured, systematic, and comprehensive. In the course of salvation history, God reveals himself and his truths as people are ready to hear and understand. He does this principally through a series of covenants with his people that help the people live as God's children. Jesus provides the Great Commandment as a context for the commandments of the Old Covenant, and offers the Beatitudes as dispositions of the heart and will that help us to follow God's law of love.

There is also a discipline to the Christian life. The Church teaches her children that to follow Jesus, we must observe the Commandments and live according to the Beatitudes. We are given the precepts of the Church so that the faithful are aware of the “very necessary minimum” in order to grow in love of God and neighbor. As catechists, we have the responsibility to help our learners understand the Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the Precepts of the Church; and learn to form and examine their consciences according to these key teachings.

It is vital that our learners know how to apply the Commandments and Beatitudes in their everyday lives. What does it mean, for example, to be a “peacemaker” on the playground at school? How does the way chores are completed at home show honor to parents? We should also form our learners to know the sources of morality discussed in the *Catechism*—the object chosen, the end in view or intention, and the circumstances of the action.⁵

Finally, it can be helpful to provide our learners with a list of steps for moral decision-making. One simple method is the “1-2-3-Check” method. In step one, we ask ourselves, “What is the problem?” It is prudent to carefully consider the situation at hand and the moral dilemma that has resulted. Step two is “What are my choices?” Here, we review all possible courses of action, prayerfully considering the morality of each action by thinking about the object, intention, and circumstances, and using the Commandments and other moral teach-

ings of the Church to inform our judgments concerning the morality of each possible action. Step three is to “Take the best action.” Here we act on the choice we have discerned through prayer and reflection. Finally, we “check” and see: how did it work? Here we will evaluate, after the fact, the consequences of the action we took. In Catholic teaching, the consequences are secondary; they do not determine the morality of an act, but they can help us to know whether it is prudent to follow the same course of action in the future or to try a different, albeit morally sound, approach.

Help your learners share the message.

The pedagogy of God is perpetual. When we let God's Word take root in our lives, we naturally share it with others, through the witness of our actions and our words. Missionary initiation is another of the six fundamental tasks of catechesis discussed in the GDC. As catechists, we help our learners live and speak as faithful witnesses of the Gospel. One way we can do this is by helping our learners articulate the moral teaching of the Church. Defending our Catholic Faith, especially as it applies to contemporary moral issues, is a critical skill. Practice talking about *why* we believe *what* we believe, and teach your learners to be persuasive in a spirit of charity, so as to help people be attracted to the beauty of our faith.

Equally important, indeed even more so, is the witness of our actions. In a culture that often does not reward, and sometimes even punishes, moral action, we are called to form a generation of Christian heroes: young men and women of extraordinary virtue who will live what they believe even at great personal cost. Share the stories of great saints and holy young men and women who showed this kind of virtue in the face of difficult circumstances—for example, St. Dominic Savio, St. Clare of Assisi, and Blessed Jose Sanchez del Rio.

Although we might sometimes feel discouraged as we see immorality in the culture around us, let us have hope that God can raise up young men and women of virtue who will transform our world. Let us remember the words of Jesus, who says, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5).

Dr. Joseph White is a clinical child psychologist and former parish catechetical leader. He currently serves as a National Catechetical Consultant for Our Sunday Visitor Publishing and is co-author of the Allelu and Alive in Christ religion series.

Notes

- 1 *General Directory for Catechesis*, art. 141.
- 2 Kohlberg, Lawrence (1973). “The Claim to Moral Adequacy of a Highest Stage of Moral Judgment”. *Journal of Philosophy* (The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 70, No. 18) 70 (18): 630–646.
- 3 Fowler, James W. (1981). *Stages of Faith*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- 4 See GDC, art. 86.
- 5 See CCC, par. 1750.

No Stumbling Block for Persons with Physical Disabilities

By Sr. M. Johanna Paruch, FSGM

Catechesis for persons who have physical disabilities is not that difficult. Only in rare cases will catechists need to make small adaptations in lesson content, unlike when preparing lessons for those with some cognitive difficulty. The greatest challenge that catechists face in preparing lessons for persons with physical disabilities has to do with making sure that the catechetical materials and the facilities are as accessible as possible.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops writes, concerning the need to welcome persons with disabilities:

Since the parish is the door to participation in the Christian experience, it is the responsibility of both pastors and laity to assure that those doors are always open. Costs must never be the controlling consideration limiting the welcome offered to those among us with disabilities, since provision of access to religious functions is a pastoral duty.¹

While we agree that our parish offerings should be accessible, every catechetical facility, school, or parish may have its own difficulties in becoming more accessible. The *National Directory for Catechesis* states, “As much as possible, persons with disabilities themselves should guide catechetical personnel in adapting curricula to their particular needs.”² For catechesis with children, parents will be our best resource. In order to be truly welcoming, though, we need to find and meet with the disabled persons in our community. Many times we might believe there are no persons with disabilities in our parishes, simply because we don’t see them. This is highly unlikely. It is quite possible that if we investigate, we may discover that the parish is in fact physically inaccessible.

Our attitude is extremely important; it must be that of Christ.³ It is not unusual to feel uncomfortable in the presence of people whose physical problems may limit their ability to function typically. In the novel, *The Stone Monkey*, by Jeffrey Deaver, the narrator comments:

Most of the people who visited him [Lincoln Rhymes] treated him like a freak. Oh, they meant no unkindness. But either they struggled to ignore his ‘condition’ as most of them referred to it or they celebrated his disability, making jokes and comments about it to show how closely they connected with him. When in fact they didn’t connect

at all...they never got below the appearance of a relationship.⁴

We must remember that every person is unique and unrepeatable and that even people who have the same disability should not be treated in exactly the same way. In fact, persons with disabilities may have very different outlooks, and they may react to their own disability in different ways; they may be accepting or bitter; dependent or independent; employed, unemployed, or underemployed; ambitious or lazy; outgoing or withdrawn; selfish or unselfish; courageous or timid; independent or dependent; brilliant, of average intelligence, or intellectually challenged; saints or sinners. We must remember that all of them are made in the image of God.

As catechists, we must figure out a way to bring everyone to Jesus. Here are some points, which have been gleaned from years of personal experience, study, and observation, and are applicable for any age and catechetical setting:

- **Know** the students: who are they, what is their home life like, what is their faith life like?
- **Know** the disability: research each disability on the Internet (use trusted sources, particularly those created by people with firsthand knowledge of the respective disability) or at a local library. See the links below.
- **Know** the age of onset of the disability; this information could help to increase our understanding of the person’s relationship to his or her particular disability. The difference between disabilities that are *congenital* and those that are *acquired* could have huge ramifications for the disabled, how they perceive themselves, and their styles of learning.
- **Know** ourselves: have we ever encountered a person with a disability before? Was the experience a good one? If we feel uncomfortable, we must find help to overcome any attitude that is other than that of Christ. Also, we must remember that if we have met one person with a disability, we have met only one person with a disability. No two people, even those with the same disability, are the same.
- **Ask** adult participants with disabilities for any changes or adjustments that may make them more able to participate in catechesis. Simply asking “what we can do for them” may be interpreted as condescension.



- **Ask** parents about any changes and adjustments that might facilitate learning for their children, but we must also allow disabled children to have a say.
- **Relate** to all students, including those who are disabled, as *persons* and make them a true part of the group. Realize that the other students will *follow our lead*.
- **Remember** to utilize all learning modalities: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic in order to benefit all students.
- **Remember** that federal law protects the use of service dogs, which must not be patted or interfered with in any way.
- **Remember** that often the person with the disability has already found the solution to anything that could be perceived as a problem.
- **Think ahead**—if the lesson diverts from the normal routine, what adaptations do we need to make it accessible?
- **Do not touch** any visual, auditory, or mobility aids, including long white canes and wheelchairs, unless we have the permission of the owner.

Visual Disabilities

Not every person who is “legally blind” is totally blind. Legally blind persons may have some light perception or may be able to read large print. Their visual field may be limited. Not all blind people use braille. Many people who are visually impaired use adaptive software or recording technology. Find out what the person’s specific needs are and provide adapted materials as necessary. A significant challenge for people who are visually impaired is safety and mobility: learn sighted guide techniques, warn if furniture has been moved and make sure that the facility is well lit. Remember that people who are considered legally blind cannot drive, so they always need transportation. Many

blind people use public transportation that may not be available on Sundays.

These websites offer additional helpful information:

Xavier Society for the Blind:

www.xaviersocietyfortheblind.org

National Federation of the Blind:

www.nfb.org

Auditory Disabilities

There are many assistive hearing devices, but they are not like glasses; their use does not necessarily mean that a person hears well. Not all deaf people read lips or speak. If a person requires an interpreter, one must be provided. Interpreters must be well trained, and they must be paid, unless they work *pro bono*.

Helpful information regarding the hearing impaired may be found here:

National Catholic Office for the Deaf: www.ncod.org

National Association of the Deaf: www.nad.org

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: www.rid.org

Disabilities that Affect Mobility

There are many, many reasons why people’s movements may be constricted, so we need to treat each disabled person as an individual. Ramps and elevators should be a normal feature of every parish and school. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that buildings have been modified to be accessible—but love, and not the law, ultimately requires that we take these steps. Please remember that there are persons whose disability is caused by a disease, such as ALS or Multiple Sclerosis, and diseases such as these may eventually take their lives. Approaching persons with limited mobility requires a deep and constant pastoral sensitivity.

More information for accompanying people with these disabilities may be found through the National Catholic Partnership on Disabilities (www.ncpd.org).⁵ In the next issue of *The Catechetical Review* we will address catechesis for persons with cognitive disabilities.

Sr. M. Johanna Paruch, FSGM, Ph.D. serves as Associate Professor of Catechetics at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio.

Notes

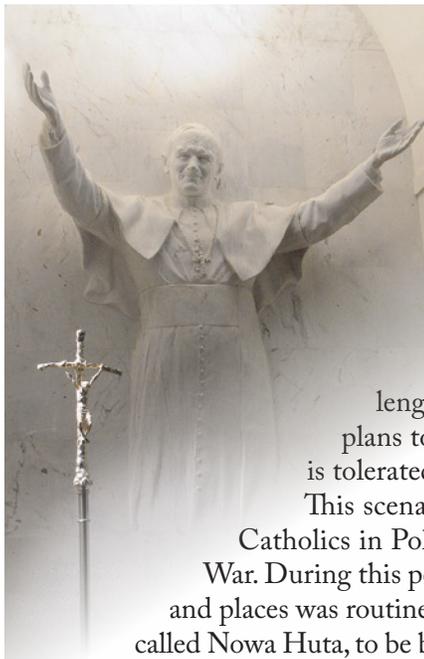
1 USCCB, *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities*, Principle 6.

2 USCCB, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 206.

3 Cf. Philippians 2:5.

4 Deaver has written a series of novels featuring Lincoln Rhymes, who is a forensic specialist and a quadriplegic. Rhymes makes the above comment in *The Stone Monkey* (Pocket Books, 2012), 253.

5 There are many associations for persons who are mobility impaired, depending on the cause of their disability.



Saint John Paul II: A Model Catechist for our Times

By Jem Sullivan

What is it like to be a catechist in a country where Christians are persecuted? What particular virtues would a catechist need in a society where parishes are illegal, and church buildings may be constructed only with government approval? Imagine the challenges of catechizing adults, teenagers, and children when civil authorities announce plans to build a community without a church; a city where no public expression of faith is tolerated; and the State does not permit public reference to God and to the Church.

This scenario is not taken from a futuristic novel or movie. It was the lived experience of Catholics in Poland, under the Communist regime in the decades following the Second World War. During this period of Polish history, the basic right to exercise and express faith in public forms and places was routinely denied or undermined. The State went so far as to plan a model workers' town, called Nowa Huta, to be built without a church. Nowa Huta was located on the outskirts of Kraków, Poland, home to then Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, the future Saint John Paul II.

This “pope of the family” is surely one of the great saints of our time. His loving and fearless witness to faith as a priest, a bishop, and as the pope offers every catechist a model to follow, even as we strive to catechize in the midst of the steady erosion of religious freedom today. From his saintly example, we may draw three lessons for catechesis in our time.

Saint John Paul II's public witness to faith was rooted in and nourished by daily personal prayer. He was known to spend an hour or two each day in his chapel in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Prayer was the lifeblood of his teaching, preaching, and catechesis. From his example, we learn that daily prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit remain the wellspring of all genuine catechetical activities.

“Prayer,” noted Saint John Paul II, “can truly change your life. For it turns your attention away from yourself and directs your mind and your heart toward the Lord. If we only look at ourselves, with our limitations and sins, we quickly give way to sadness and discouragement.”¹

A second quality he had and that catechists can imitate, was his fearless confidence in the power of truth to convert hearts and minds, to lift up drooping spirits, and to strengthen the oppressed; and this confidence inspired his catechetical ministry. Saint John Paul II was convinced that truth carries an accompanying grace, the grace of God himself. Error is not accompanied by grace, even though it seems to have all the needed means to spread and increase its influence. For example, in defending the faithful against the oppressive tactics of Communist authorities then-Cardinal Wojtyła was often called to speak the truth in love. The truth to which he pointed was not an abstraction or a counter ideology; rather, it was the Truth made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. As pope he would stress that “at the heart of

catechesis we find, in essence, a person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth.”² Looking to his saintly example, catechists find courage to teach and witness to truth in the face of misunderstanding, opposition, and even hostility.

A third lesson to draw from Saint John Paul II is the example of his personal witness to charity and holiness of life that permeated his proclamation of the Gospel. We might say that his catechetical method was guided by the most convincing tools of a catechist: personal holiness and charity in all things.

These qualities can be embodied and shared with those we catechize, even if they struggle to understand and accept the truth of the Gospel because of popular misperceptions, nagging doubts, prolonged attachment to sin, or hostility to the Church. People may find it easy to argue with this or that particular teaching or precept of the Church, but it is difficult to argue with a living witness to charity and personal holiness. Catechists can take to heart the urging of Saint John Paul II to strive for “holiness, that convinces without the need for words, (holiness that) is becoming the living reflection of the face of Christ in the world.”³

Perseverance in prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit, confidence in the truth of the Gospel, and holiness of life guided the teaching, preaching, and catechesis of Saint John Paul II. These virtues can also surely guide the ministry of a catechist today.

Jem Sullivan, Ph.D. catechist, professor, and author, writes on catechesis and the new evangelization.

Notes

- 1 John Paul II, *Speech to Youth*, New Orleans, 1987.
- 2 John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, art. 5.
- 3 John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, art. 7.

On the Thirtieth Anniversary of St. John Paul II's Letter to Youth

By Bob Rice



Thirty years ago, in 1985, coinciding with the “International Youth Year” proclaimed by the United Nations, St. John Paul II wrote *Dilecti Amici*, a letter to the youth of the world. Though many of his previous documents mentioned young people, *Dilecti Amici* was unique among St. John Paul II's letters because its entire content was directed towards the young. It revealed not only what he thought about them but also how he felt they should be addressed. For these reasons, it offers much, by example, about how the Church should relate to youth.

Much of the letter reflected on the story of the “rich young man,” who didn't follow Christ because he could not give up his many possessions. With keen spiritual insight, St. John Paul II wrote that the greatest possession this man had was his youthfulness. “Youth is in itself (independently of any material goods) a special treasure of man.”¹ Christ not only asked this young man to leave his material possessions but to offer up his own youthfulness to follow him. Evangelists today should realize how significant this sacrifice is, especially in a culture where people are reluctant to “grow up.”

Though the young man's possessions kept him from following Jesus, it was his youthful curiosity that brought him to Christ in the first place. Young people aren't afraid to ask difficult questions, such as the young man did in the story. Christ not only provides the answers, he is *the* answer. Those who speak with the young must not be afraid to answer their questions, but they must also do more. They need to help young people ponder new questions, such as the meaning of life, the meaning of good and evil, and the importance of eternity.

Jesus came into the man's town, perhaps unexpectedly, and the young man knew enough about him to seek him out. Today we must prepare young people for a moment of encounter, when they will experience Christ's love in a deeper way. John Paul II described the moment like this: “I do not know at what moment of your life. I think that it will happen when you need it most: perhaps in suffering, perhaps together with the witness of a pure conscience, as in the case of that young man in the Gospel, or perhaps precisely in an opposite situation: together with the sense of guilt, with remorse of conscience.”²

Christ invited the rich young man to leave everything and follow him. In his letter to youth, John Paul II tied that call into the vocations of priesthood and religious life, a call many hear in their youth. He also wrote that many

would be called to the Sacrament of Marriage: “When Christ says, ‘Follow me,’ his call can mean: ‘I call you to still another love.’”³ In language that seems like it was written today and not thirty years ago, the saint warned youth of the distorted view that culture has of marriage and encouraged them to be courageous to go against popular opinion.

Unfortunately, the rich young man went away sad. St. John Paul II acknowledged the many things that keep young people from following Christ: skepticism, passivity, selfishness, alcohol and drug abuse, short-lived sexual relationships, indifference, and violence. He exhorted them to “Put yourselves on guard against the fraud of a world that wants to exploit or misdirect your energetic and powerful search for happiness and meaning.”⁴

He encouraged young people to focus on their education and think of how they could grow in their talents and contribute to society. Young people grow from study; they also grow from experiencing the visible world. St. John Paul II acknowledged that growth required effort and could sometimes be tiring, but it was the only way to experience the joy of self-mastery and victory over challenges. Nowhere did he suggest that following Christ was easy; he was unafraid to call young people to the challenges of discipleship.

St. John Paul II concluded with a challenge and affirmation of youth: “You are also strong for the struggle: not for the struggle of one against another in the name of some ideology or practice separated from the very roots of the Gospel, but strong for the struggle against evil.”⁵

Nowhere in this letter did St. John Paul II “talk down” to young people. He lifted them up and let them know about their inherent dignity and the special love that God has for them, while at the same time he warned them to properly form their consciences and avoid temptations that would destroy their youthful ambitions. In *Dilecti Amici*, St. John Paul II provided a model for how to communicate the faith to young people, and we who work with the young would be wise to emulate him.

Bob Rice is an Associate Professor of Theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville, where he teaches courses on youth ministry and Scripture.

Notes

- 1 John Paul II, *Dilecti Amici* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1985), art. 3.
- 2 *Ibid.*, art. 7.
- 3 *Ibid.*, art. 10.
- 4 *Ibid.*, art. 13.
- 5 *Ibid.*, art. 15.

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). Christ’s promise may be counted on by any catechist in any catechetical situation. In this department, we wish to include testimonies from catechists who speak of how God’s unique presence in the catechetical setting may be discovered. We hope you enjoy and are encouraged by these testimonies as we all attune ourselves to his presence in the catechetical mission.

Speaking His Language

I’ve always loved the fire and zeal of St. Francis Xavier and found inspiration in his inculturation as he handed on the faith to those in the Far East. I never thought that working in a high school classroom in New Jersey would afford me the chance to walk in his footsteps, but that is where I found myself in September of 2012. Our school, struggling with declining enrollment, experienced an influx of students from China who came on exchange with minimal knowledge of the English language, and their knowledge of God even more wanting.

The juniors were assigned my Theology of the Church class which I began with a brief walk through Salvation History to frame the context for Christ establishing the Church. I recounted how God reveals himself to man and invites him to relationship, especially through the Incarnation.

Most of them struggled because of the language, but it was evident that some were wrestling with the content, not just for lack of understanding, but because they were encountering a Truth with which they had never before been confronted, the Truth who is Jesus Christ. Without knowing their language, I felt inadequate which brought me to my knees relying on Christ to be the primary catechist in my classroom.

“Peng” approached me one day concerned about his grade, but I could tell that his questions were more. We agreed to meet after school so I could help him comprehend some of the complex catechetical language which, despite my best efforts at speaking slowly, clearly, and with impromptu hand motions, still made little sense to him. While my attempts to hand on the Gospel were lacking, the Holy Spirit was at work. The next afternoon he came



and, taking out his notebook, we began our conversation. I checked his notes, helped him with spelling and pronunciation, and gave some brief explanations of vocabulary terms about which he was unsure.

In that moment, God inspired me to recount to Peng the story of salvation in a more personal manner using the bulletin board I had crafted to celebrate the upcoming Year of Faith. It was adorned with the articles of the Creed along with images depicting each and the phrase “I believe” in the languages native to all of the students in the school. We began by looking at Michelangelo’s images of creation from the Sistine Chapel and made our way to the moment of the Incarnation. Looking at Fra Angelico’s Annunciation and Lotto’s Nativity, Peng asked, “So Jesus is God-Man?” “Yes,” I replied. “Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is God and he became one of us so that we could be one with him and share his life.”

“So I can be God?” he asked. “Pretty much, Peng. You were made to be great, and God

wants to give you his life, called grace, so that you can know him, love him, and serve him on earth and so that you can live with him forever in heaven.”

“No one has ever told me this,” he said.

“If this is true, I need to know more. This is not like the gods that my family knows.” There was a sense of displeasure that this was the first he was hearing of the Living God who became man. I tried to console him and assured him that I was ready and willing to walk with him during his time in my class so that he would come to encounter Christ more deeply and respond with his life.

From that point forward, Peng was different in class and among the other exchange students; he exhibited an openness and desire that was visible as he drank in the truth of the Gospel. At the conclusion of that year, I was transferred to a new assignment and Peng returned to China. I am not sure if he returned for a second year at that school or if what he learned in my class that year continued to take root after our ways parted. But I am confident that the intercession of St. Francis Xavier and

the power of the Holy Spirit were operative while we walked together and that the Word of God proclaimed to Peng will not return to the Lord empty (cf. Isaiah 55:11).

Sr. M. Karolyn Nunes, FSGM
Kansas City, Kansas

Praying from a Place of Weakness

In our “restored order” diocese, the norm is for children to make their First Confession in second grade and receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in third grade at their First Communion Mass. Most of my fifth and sixth grade students had been attending catechetical sessions since preschool and all were fully initiated and attended Mass every Sunday with their families. It was every catechist’s “dream class.”

Still, I found our catechetical sessions challenging. The students seemed to *expect* to be bored and I was constantly looking for ways to engage them actively. Because I knew my students’ families, perhaps I held unreasonable expectations concerning how well they would behave.

One particular evening, the topic was *Lectio Divina* or *Praying the Scriptures*. Depending a little too much on my lesson plan, and not enough on the Holy Spirit, I launched into the presentation with all the enthusiasm I could muster. Two or three boys ignored me, indulging in private conversation, and disregarding my admonishments to stop talking. I tried several different tactics, but nothing helped. My growing impatience finally exploded in a rather crude expression completely out of character for me: “I am sick and tired of your crap!”



In the silence that followed, my students gazed at me, wide-eyed; uncertain what to expect from me next. I, too, was shaken by my outburst, and embarrassed. From this place of weakness a prayer arose from my heart: “God, I need your help! I don’t know where to go from here!”

Opting for transparency, I apologized to the young people for speaking to them in a way not in keeping with their dignity. I reminded them that not only did they deserve my respect, but I deserved theirs because we are all made in God’s image and likeness. When I realized that I had not begun our session that evening with prayer, I told the students I had forgotten to begin with the most important part. Then we simply started over.

A humiliating failure on my part, by God’s grace, became a new beginning for me and this group of fifth and sixth grade students. Students who were previously shy entered into discussion more freely and *Lectio Divina* became one of their favorite forms of prayer.

Lani Bogart
Phoenix, Arizona

The Car, the Barn, and the Woods

The goal of the catechist is to lead others to an encounter with the living God, leading them to conversion.

My father, Pat Brueggen, was my CCD instructor, youth minister, sports coach, but most importantly my role model for the faith. The man I got to see after the cleanup from our lock-ins and football games was a person whose faith was intertwined in the way he lived his life. Catholicism was not merely an 8-5 job, but it was what drove every facet of his life. The barn, the woods, and the car may not seem like primary places of catechesis, but this is where I learned my faith and grew closer to Jesus. My dad would listen to Scott Hahn cassette tapes while milking the cows and would always take time to pass that knowledge on to us. I would watch my father in the tree stand dressed in his blaze orange, shivering with a rosary in his hand because of the freezing temperatures. In the car, every time we would pass a Church, he would reverently make a sign of the cross to remind himself and those in the car that Jesus was present there. God was continually working through my father in a way that prompted me to want to have a relationship with God myself.

Over the course of my life, I have seen the Holy Spirit working in my dad, which drew me to want the same Spirit to live and be seen in me.

Andrew Brueggen
Holmen, Wisconsin

If you have an experience, which you could share with readers of how God was present to you or those you catechize in the catechetical process, please consider emailing your story to us at editor@catechetics.com. Submissions must be no more than 700 words in order to be considered for publication. Writing requirements are available on our website, www.catechetics.com.

The End of the Fiery Sword: Adam & Eve and Jesus & Mary

by Maura Roan McKeegan and illustrated by T. Schluenderfritz
(Emmaus Road Publishing, 2014), 19 pages.
ISBN: 978-1-63446-003-3

At that very moment he rejoiced [in] the Holy Spirit and said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will." (Luke 10:21)

The Church inherited her method of reading the bible from her elder brother, the Jewish people. This method, called typology, first appears in the primary Christian documents, the Gospels. There we see how St. Matthew, not content merely to narrate events, wants us to understand these events in light of the entire history of God's mighty deeds. Thus, as soon as he outlines the initial circumstances of Jesus' birth, he writes, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us' (Matt 1:22). In fact, Matthew repeatedly interrupts the flow of his narration to indicate connections to the Hebrew Scriptures. Meanwhile, in each of the Gospels, Jesus often refers to the sacred writings of his people and uses these references to reveal his own divinity; imagine what it must have been like to sit in the synagogue of Nazareth, watch Jesus roll up the scroll and sit down in silence, and hear him say to the assembled, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21).

As the Church grew, she began to compose the prayers and rites of the sacred liturgy; and in this process, she attentively steeped herself in all the events of salvation history, making more and more connections. For example, the opening lines of the Gloria connect us to that hill in Bethlehem, when some simple men, smelling of sheep, beheld the "glory of the Lord" shining all about them, and received the extraordinary announcement that the God and Lord of everything had become a small child. Later,

during the Sanctus, we repeat another angelic song, that of the seraphim who attended the Lord when he first called the prophet Isaiah.

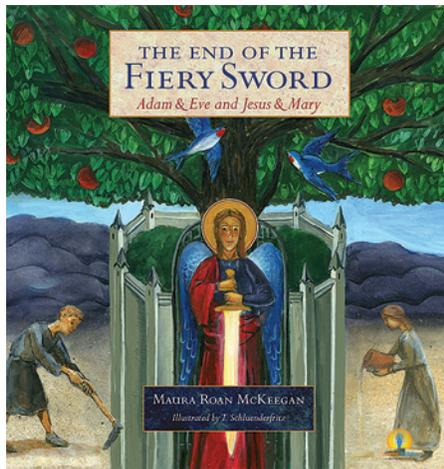
Sofia Cavalletti writes that "the typological method is the method of exegesis that either begins with the present phase of salvation history, and searches for its roots in the events, institutions, and persons of the Old Testament, or begins with the Old Testament, and reads it in light of the events of the New Testament" (*History's Golden Thread*, p.17), and she points out that typology draws children and fills them with wonder. She has conjectured that children, being young like the Church in her infancy, hunger in the same way for the connection that typology teaches us to discern and celebrate.

In the picture book, *The End of the Fiery Sword*, Maura Roan McKeegan presents a text, addressed to children, that answers this hunger. A poem on the title page introduces the sense of mystery and adventure that accompanies any typological research; and by referring to scriptural connections as "a hidden part" and "buried treasures," she piques her readers' interest and introduces them to the method of typology. In facing pages, with both simple and colorful illustrations by T. Schluenderfritz, the Old Testament precedents appear beside their New Testament fulfillment: Eve in the garden of Eden, Mary in her home; the former's sin and disobedience balanced, on a facing page, by Mary's obedience; in later facing pages, the story contrasts the events of Adam's fall with the humble sacrifice of Christ, who opened the gates of paradise, which had formerly been closed because of Adam's sin.

For those looking for a children's book that remains in concert with the Church's methods and displays the capacity to awaken contemplation and prayer in any reader, this gem of a book will bring the essence of the Gospel to children, who long to find the very connections McKeegan has so beautifully laid out in *The End of the Fiery Sword*.

Reviewer

Suzanne M. Lewis is assistant editor of *The Catechetical Review*.





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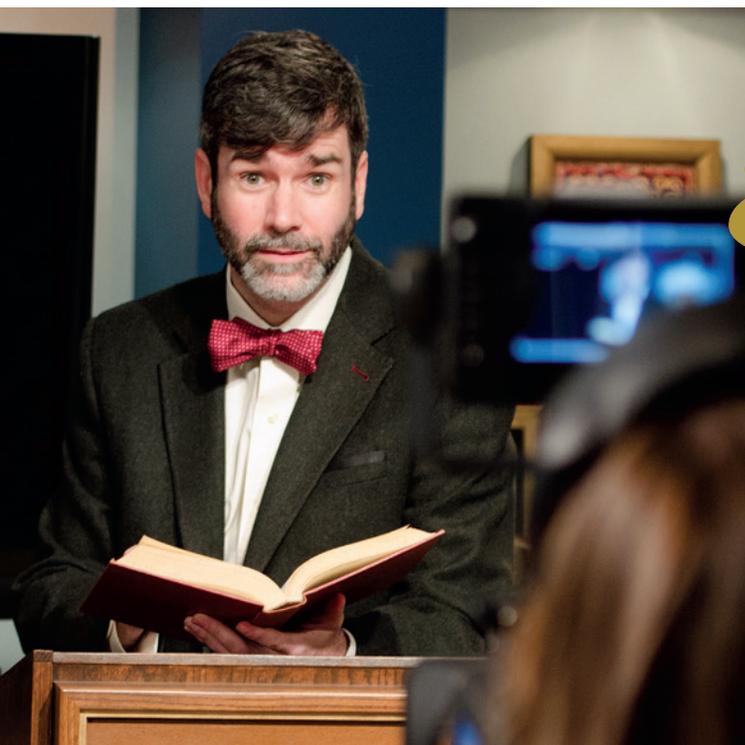
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