

**Monday Adoration: June 12, 2006**  
**By Fr. Callistus Isara, MSP**

## **Catechesis in the Church (2)**

**Preamble:** Two weeks ago when we reflected on the above topic, I raised many questions and I wish to recall some of them: Who are those in the Church likely to be lost to the Pentecostals? Were they ever grounded in the faith and doctrines of the Church? What are the catechetical methods used in parishes in Nigeria? Have religious instructors been sufficiently trained to transmit the faith to others in fruitful and effective manners? Who are the religious instructors in our parishes? Brothers and Sisters, the importance of catechesis in the Church makes these questions vital for the renewal and the education of the faith of Catholics: adults and children alike. Hopefully, we shall reflect on how best to actualize solid catechesis in the Nigerian Church.

### **Catechesis in the Post-Vatican II Church**

The Second Vatican Council took catechesis seriously which led to the retrieval of **The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)**. The central role accorded catechesis by Vatican II led to a renewed emphasis on catechesis and the flowery of catechetical documents in the post-Vatican II Church. A *General Catechetical Directory* was published in 1971 by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy. This was followed by a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI on “Evangelization in the Modern World,” *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in 1975; a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on “Catechesis in our Time,” *Catechesi Tradendae*, by John Paul II in 1979; the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992 and *The General Directory for Catechesis* in 1997.

Over a period of time in the post-Vatican II Church, there was a sustained emphasis and development in the understanding of catechesis. The 1977 Synod of Bishops focused exclusively on **catechesis**. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* describes catechesis as an element of evangelization in the mission of the Church. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* sees catechetical instruction and all forms of catechesis as part of the evangelizing mission of the Church. *Catechesi Tradendae* sees catechesis as one of the elements, “a very remarkable one in the whole process of evangelization” (**Catechesi Tradendae, #18**). Following *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Catechesi Tradendae*, the 1997 *General Directory for Catechesis* clearly developed the understanding of catechesis as **a moment in the process of evangelization**.

With this renewed emphasis and understanding of catechesis, it is quite clear that catechesis cannot be separated from the pastoral and missionary activity of the Church. Through catechesis, the Church realizes and fulfills the missionary mandate of Christ (See Matthew 28:19-20). Catechesis seeks to nourish and deepen the faith of members of the Church in such a way that they are ready to embrace the missionary mandate of Christ. A Christian cannot be actively involved in evangelization if his or her faith has not been deepened. Catechesis helps the member to know his or her faith, to deepen it, to live it out in the Christian community, to celebrate it, to witness to it, and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. Thus, being a Christian involves more than attending Mass on Sunday. The Christian vocation calls for a greater commitment to the faith and a participation in the life of the mission of the Church.

It is the responsibility of every local Church to actualize this renewed emphasis and understanding of catechesis in the Church. The **onus** rests on each diocesan bishop to actively promote catechesis in the diocese. Each diocese should invest in designing catechetical programmes that will bolster the deepening and education of faith of Catholics. Bishops have largely entrusted this important ministry to the Directors of Religious Education who are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that catechesis is ongoing, alive and well in the diocese. Apart from the Directors of Religious Education, the task of catechesis belongs to the entire Christian community. The true exercise of catechesis is at the parish level since the parish is the immediate setting for living out the Christian life. Thus, the parish priest has a grave obligation to uphold and sustain a viable catechesis in the parish. The parish pastoral council also has a grave responsibility to assist the priest in fostering a viable and fruitful catechesis in the parish.

### **Catechesis and the post-Vatican II Popes**

Catechesis has been pivotal in the ministries of the popes of the post-Vatican II Church. Paul VI approved the 1971 *General Catechetical Directory*. He initiated the theme of evangelization for the Synod of Bishops in 1974 which led to the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelization in the Modern World.” Similarly, he initiated the theme of catechesis for the Synod of Bishops in 1977. However, Paul VI could not publish a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation before his death. So was Pope John Paul I who died after just thirty-three days as pope. It was John Paul II, who taking up the inheritance of his two predecessors, eventually published a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on “Catechesis in our Time.”

John Paul II attested to Paul VI’s magnificent pastoral solicitude for catechesis: “Through his gestures, his preaching, his authoritative interpretation of the Second Vatican Council (considered by him as the great catechism of modern times), and through the whole of his life, my venerated predecessor Paul VI served the Church’s catechesis in a particularly exemplary fashion” (**Catechesi Tradendae, #2**). John Paul II equally testified on the importance of catechesis to him as a pastor: “Catechesis has always been a central care in my ministry as a priest and as a bishop” (**Catechesi Tradendae, #4**).

John Paul II used his weekly audience after reciting the Angelus to catechize the faithful who thronged to St. Peter’s square. The pope spent a considerable amount of time catechizing on the Psalms before his death. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI continued with the catechesis on the Psalms from where John Paul II stopped until he completed all the psalms. Pope Benedict XVI has continued with this magnificent catechetical zeal of his predecessors. Presently, Pope Benedict XVI, in his weekly audience, has just begun a catechetical series on the twelve apostles. He began with the apostle **Peter**. He has spent the past few weeks catechizing on **Peter**. This series of catechesis will focus on all the apostles. Undoubtedly, catechesis is dear to the heart of Pope Benedict XVI.

**Conclusion:** The challenge today is that if catechesis will be alive and active in the Nigerian Church, all Catholics have a great contribution to make to its success and fruitfulness. I hope and pray that all of us will strive hard to meet this challenge. Thank you for listening and God bless you. *Praise the Lord!*