

**Monday Adoration: June 19, 2006**  
**By Fr. Callistus Isara, MSP**

## **Catechesis in the Church (3)**

### **Preamble**

As I have pointed out in this series on “**Catechesis in the Church**,” catechesis is the deepening and maturing of the faith of members of the Church. Education in the faith is very important in the Church because that is one of the ways to sustain our faith throughout life. Therefore, catechesis is an ongoing education in the faith which leads to the gradual deepening of the faith in such a way that one is truly conformed to Jesus Christ by faith, words and actions. Catechesis is a life-long process. Baptism occurs once in a lifetime but catechesis occurs continuously in a life time. Catechesis enables us to live fully the Christian vocation and other vocations in the Church for which one is called: priesthood, religious life, married life, single state. Irrespective of one’s status and background, the sacrament of baptism unifies all of us. Baptism lays the foundation upon which catechesis builds on. Thus, all the members of the Christian community must avail themselves of catechesis for the sake of the growth of their faith. Our presence here every week is one of such ways of deepening our faith and our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

### **The Right to Catechesis**

John Paul II describes catechesis as “an experience as old as the Church.” He further states that “the Church has always looked on catechesis as a sacred duty and an inalienable right” (**Catechesi Tradendae 14**). John Paul II goes on to say that “every baptized person, precisely by reason of being baptized, has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life” (**Catechesi Tradendae 14**). Be that as it may, it means that first, Catholics must realize the importance of catechesis and be available to benefit from what the Church offers especially at the parish level since the parish is the *locus* or setting for the practice of ministry in the Church. The life of the Church is concretized at the parish level. The complaint in many parishes is that parishioners simply don’t attend programmes that would enhance their faith: parish retreat, seminar, workshop, devotions, parish prayers, etc. The right of all Christians to receive catechesis will not materialize when parishioners do not avail themselves of the means to actualize this right. How come that Catholics respond so poorly to spiritual programmes? The overwhelming majority of Catholics are contented with attending Mass on Sunday and that is all. What does the Church need to do in order to change this trend?

### **Recipients of Catechesis**

Since catechesis is a right of the baptized, they can claim such right from their pastors. According to **Catechesi Tradendae**, “All believers have a right to catechesis; all pastors have the duty to provide it” (**Catechesi Tradendae 64**). Therefore, catechesis should be a priority in parishes and should be directed towards all the groups in the Church: infants, children, the young, adults, the aged, the handicapped, etc. **Catechesi Tradendae** urges that everybody should be catechized in the Church irrespective of age groups. The handicapped are specially

mentioned. They should not be forgotten in the catechetical programmes of parishes. They have a right like others of their age, to know the “mystery of faith” (**Catechesi Tradendae 45**).

From the Church’s teachings, we can see that catechesis is not only for children preparing to receive the sacraments but for all Catholics. The *onus* rests squarely on pastors to sustain viable catechetical programmes in parishes. Even if the turn out is not encouraging, pastors of souls must never relent in making catechesis available to every group in the parish. Pastors of souls should diligently dedicate their energy to effective and fruitful catechetical programmes in order for the faith of their parishioners to be alive and well and can thus stand the test of the daily vicissitudes of life. John Paul II appeals passionately to the Church’s ministers with regard to catechesis: “With all my strength I beg you, ministers of Jesus Christ: Do not, for lack of zeal or because of some preconceived idea, leave the faithful without catechesis” (**Catechesi Tradendae 64**).

## **Catechesis and Young People**

Although every group in the Church has a right to catechesis, young people remain a special target group for catechesis. The challenge to adequately catechize the young is quite enormous. This group oftentimes is prone to experimentation with other churches which eventually could lead, and in fact has led, to some of them actually leaving the Church. Pope John Paul II had special interest for young people. He easily connected with them especially at *World Youth Days* which he initiated during his pontificate. John Paul II in his old age was always energized when he was with young people especially on those *World Youth Day* ceremonies. The young people loved John Paul II to death. Even at his funeral, the young people called for John Paul II to be declared a saint immediately.

Pope Benedict XVI has continued in the footsteps of his beloved predecessor to whom he refers always in his addresses. If John Paul II connected so well with young people at a global level, the Church at both diocesan and parish levels must endeavour to equally connect with young people and make the Church relevant to them. The catechesis of young people is absolutely necessary. It is needless to say that this should be the concern of every diocese and parish respectively. Early this month, Pope Benedict XVI said that educating young people in faith is a fundamental task of the Church. He pointed out how “educating new generations in the faith is a great and fundamentally important task that involves the entire Christian community, “one that has become particularly difficult” today and, hence, is “even more important and urgent.”

## **Conclusion**

Brothers and sisters, as I share these reflections with you, I have a sense that so much needs to be done by the Nigerian Church in the area of catechesis. There must be an organized and systematized approach to catechesis in the Nigerian Church. We cannot just be contented with the old and routine ways of instruction in the faith. We must ask what else should be done. And there must be a good will and commitment on the part of the clergy, religious, and laity alike in order to discern and discover the invaluable varied ways of providing fruitful and effective catechesis in the Nigerian Church.

Thank you for listening. *Praise the Lord!*