

Monday Adoration: July 17, 2006
By Fr. Callistus Isara, MSP

Catechesis in the Church (5)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Preamble

The importance of catechesis in the Church was one of the issues discussed at the Second Vatican Council. The Fathers of Vatican II mandated that a General Catechetical Directory should be published for the Church as a source of Catechisms and Directories for individual Dioceses and Episcopal Conferences of Bishops. The aim of a General Catechetical Directory was to spell out the content of catechesis from which local Churches can draw up their own Catechisms. The Fathers of Vatican II endorsed a Catechetical Directory rather than a Catechism for the universal Church. They felt that a General Catechetical Directory was feasible for the needs of the Church at that time. Following this mandate of Vatican II, a General Catechetical Directory was published in 1971 by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy.

What is a Catechism?

A catechism is an organized and systematic presentation of the Christian faith as contained in Sacred Scripture, the living Sacred Tradition of the Church, and the doctrines of the Church which are taught by the Magisterium of the Church, that is, the teaching authority of the Church. The Catholic Church is both a sacramental Church and a doctrinal Church. She teaches the contents of the faith in order for people to assent to the truths of the faith. There is an indispensable need for a catechism to sum up the Christian faith in order for the Church to impart the faith and fulfill its teaching mission.

The Present Catechism of the Catholic Church

The present *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published on October 11, 1992. One might ask why the publication of a Catechism when the Second Vatican Council decided that it was not feasible to have a universal catechism. The initiative for the present Catechism began during the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985. The purpose of this Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, which was convoked by Pope John Paul II, was to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council and to make assessment of the place of the Council in the life of the Church. During this Synod, the Synod Fathers recommended to the Holy Father the need for a Catechism for the universal Church. The Holy Father welcomed this proposal which was eventually actualized on October 11, 1992, with the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Despite the 1971 General catechetical Directory, the Synod Fathers also saw the need to have a Catechism for the universal Church as a **compendium of faith and morals and as an authoritative source for education in the faith**.

John Paul II enjoined the Church's pastors and the Christian faithful, "to receive this catechism in a spirit of communion and to use it assiduously in fulfilling their mission of proclaiming the faith and calling people to the Gospel life. This catechism is given to them that it may be a sure and authentic reference text for teaching catholic doctrine and particularly for

preparing local catechisms” (**Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 5**). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* enhances a better and more fruitful education of the faith. A sound knowledge of the faith is necessary in the Nigerian Church. This will help to stem the tide towards Pentecostalism and drifting to other Churches by some Catholics. A Catholic who is versed in the doctrine and knowledge of the faith is unlikely to be confused and go to other Churches for spiritual nourishment.

Those to Receive Catechism

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is meant for all the members of the Church. Catechism is not only for those preparing to receive the sacraments. Thus, after one has received the sacraments of initiation, one still needs to attend catechism classes. However, catechism classes should be designed to meet the needs of adults who seek to strengthen their faith. Thus, it is important to make at least part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* available to parishioners in a series over a period of time. It should be adapted to meet the needs of local Churches.

Those to teach Catechism

Any practicing Catholic with a fair knowledge of the faith and doctrine of the Church is eligible to teach catechism. In other words, one does not have to study theology or to be a saint in order to teach catechism. One must manifest the desire to impart the faith as a prerequisite for teaching others catechism. Sadly, there are few parishioners who make themselves available to teach catechism. Some parishioners consider teaching catechism as the function of the catechist and a few persons who may wish to help the catechist. **This is not true.** All Christians are called to teach catechism in the Church in virtue of their baptism and confirmation. Last week, we saw the indispensable ministry of the catechist in the mission of the Church. One does not have to be a trained catechist to teach catechism in the Church. There is a dearth of catechism teachers in parishes. Oftentimes, this sacred duty is left to young adults and even children. There must be a concerted effort to recruit catechism teachers in parishes. This is a challenge for pastors and parishioners in parishes. We need more people to avail themselves of the unique privilege of teaching the faith to our children and converts to the Church. This is an aspect of catechesis that requires the service of many parishioners. The Sunday School Teachers are catechism teachers because they impart the faith to our children.

Conclusion

All Christians are both recipients of catechesis and servants of catechesis. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the best resource material on faith and morals and for the teaching catechism in the Church. Catholics should acquaint themselves with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Dioceses should adapt it to the spiritual needs of parishioners especially those preparing for the sacraments. How the faith is imparted to our children should be the concern of all parishioners. Hence all hands must be on deck in order to have a solid catechetical programme in our parishes. *Praise the Lord!*