

Monday Adoration: October 9, 2006
By Fr. Callistus Isara, MSP

Catechesis in the Church (7)

Methodology of Catechesis

Preamble

Catechesis is the live wire of the Christian life. Through catechesis we become grounded in the Christian faith, faithfully practice it, and share it joyfully with others. There is an official period of transmitting and strengthening the faith of children and converts to the Church, which culminates in their reception of the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, Holy Eucharist. The whole essence of catechesis is the transmission of the faith. Hence catechesis requires a lot of sustained teaching and instruction in the Christian faith. Oftentimes, the concern of catechesis is not only on the **content** of catechesis but on the **method** of catechesis. This raises the question of “how” to transmit the faith fruitfully and effectively. What method or methods should be used in the transmission of the faith to children, adolescence, adults, and different groups in the Church? Methodology will be the focus of our reflection this evening.

Diversity of Methods

The various official catechetical documents of the Church insist on diversity of methods in catechesis. The Church does not have any particular method nor does the Church endorse any single method of catechesis. Instead, the Church continually discerns contemporary methods for the effective and fruitful transmission of the faith. The overriding concern of the Church in catechesis is the transmission of the faith. Evidently, “catechetical methodology has the simple objective of education in the faith” (**General Directory for Catechesis, #148**). The Church avails itself of the sciences and various means of communication for the purpose of transmitting the faith. A variety of methods is a sign of the richness of the Church and the acknowledgment of the diversity of the Church whose members are called by God from every corner of the earth.

Two methods worth referring to in the history of catechesis in the Church are the *inductive* and *deductive* methods. The *inductive* method is teaching from the particular to the universal, from effect to cause. This means using concrete facts such as biblical events, the liturgy, the life of the Church, and our individual faith experiences, to come to divine revelation and God’s message for us. From concrete life and faith experiences, we come to the truths of divine revelation; from visible knowledge to invisible reality; from practical faith experience to our understanding of God’s revelation. The *deductive* method, on the other hand, begins from the universal to the particular; from cause to effect. This means understanding first the content of divine revelation, biblical passage, liturgy, etc., and then relating them to individual or particular situations in life. Catechesis would be more productive if both inductive and deductive methods complement one another.

Memorization has been an integral aspect of transmitting the faith from the beginning of Christianity. There was oral transmission of the faith before the Bible was written. There are various aspects of our faith that should be committed to memory. Some of the major texts in the Bible, the teachings of the Church, some parts of the liturgy, and the common prayers of the Christian Tradition: the creed, Our Father, Hail Mary, etc. Most of us learnt catechism by

memorization. This method is still prevalent today in the Nigerian Church. Memorization works quite well with children but it needs to be followed by some form of explanation in the case of adults. Presently, memorization remains the dominant means of preparing people for the sacraments in Nigeria.

Jesus the Greatest Teacher

Our Lord used parables and metaphors to teach the people about the kingdom of God. A parable is a comparison of an action or person to another action or person for the purpose of teaching religious truths. A metaphor means the application of one thing or person to another thing or person. For example, Jesus says: “You are the salt of the earth,” (Mt 5:13) “You are the light of the word” (Mt 5:14). It is through the use of parables and metaphors that our Lord Jesus conveyed to his listeners the reality and truth of the kingdom of God. Let us look at some scripture texts in this regard:

- “Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, and he told them many things in parables” (Mt 13:1).
- “In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables” (Mt 13:34).
- Jesus said: “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden: it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air sheltered in its branches” (Lk 13:18-19).

Methodology in the Nigerian Church

The challenge for the Nigerian Church is to constantly seek the most effective methods of transmitting the faith to every group in the Church. Perhaps, it is worth asking: How do children learn? How do adults learn? Can one method of catechesis suffice for both children and adults? What about young people? How can the Church reach out to young people? Some people have observed that young Catholics go to other churches because the Catholic Church does not meet their need. They assert that young people do not find the Church relevant to their lives; that they do not find fulfillment in the Church. What method of catechesis does the Nigerian Church need to implement in order to reach out to young people?

I would suggest that the use of Story-Telling would enhance our catechetical instruction. Story-Telling has been a vital tool of communication in our culture. Perhaps, we can revive story-telling in catechism classes. Our Lord used story telling in the form of parables to teach the people. We could tap into the reservoir of our story-telling culture to transmit the faith. We can use stories to catechize on the faith and other Christian values, etc. The use of music, the media, drama, faith sharing, bible studies, catechetical renewal, etc., could enhance the transmission of the faith. In line with diocesan guidelines, the parish pastoral council can decide and implement the most suitable method of catechesis in their parish. *Lord, renew and strengthen our faith always. Amen!*