

A Sunday for Catechists?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT CATECHETICAL SUNDAY

Many Catholics will be surprised to learn that September 18, 2005, marks the seventieth annual celebration of Catechetical Sunday. Some might even wonder what Catechetical Sunday is. The bishops hope to increase familiarity with and participation in Catechetical Sunday celebrations in Catholic parishes throughout the United States. To that end, they offer these responses to some common questions about Catechetical Sunday.

Why do we celebrate Catechetical Sunday?

In 1935, the Vatican published *On the Better Care and Promotion of Catechetical Education*, a document that asks every country to acknowledge the importance of the Church's teaching ministry and to honor those who serve the Christian community as catechists. For the first few years after Catechetical Sunday was established, national catechetical congresses were held in conjunction with the celebration. Since 1971, the USCCB's Department of Education has produced materials to help parishes celebrate the event at the local level.

The word "catechetical" is unfamiliar to most people. What does it mean?

The word might be more familiar than you think. Many Catholics have used the word "catechism" for years, and they know it has something to do with the compendium of the Church's teachings. The root word, "catechesis," is from a Greek word meaning "to echo, or resound." Catechesis is the act of resounding or bringing the Church's teachings to the world. A catechist is one who teaches in the name of the Church.

Why do we have a special day set aside to commission catechists?

Catechesis is a distinct and special ministry in the Church. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes clear, "Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church's life . . . her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan depend essentially on catechesis" (no. 7). This ministry of teaching in the name of the Church has a profound dignity, which is why catechists are formally commissioned by the Church. It is only fitting that we set aside a day to highlight this ministry and invite the entire church community to think about our responsibility to share our faith with others.

How are parents, the primary catechists of their children, recognized on Catechetical Sunday?

Parents are truly the primary catechists of their children. They prepare the soil and plant the first seeds of faith. On Catechetical Sunday, we not only highlight the work of catechists in parishes and schools, but we also commend parents and guardians and encourage them to take seriously their role of making their Catholic households a place where faith is passed on to the next generation. This is why the rite of blessing of catechists used on Catechetical Sunday includes an optional blessing of parents and guardians.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has designated the third Sunday in September as Catechetical Sunday.

Catechist's Prayer

Loving God, Father,
Son, and Spirit.

Help me to seek you
in all I do each day.

Help me to grow closer to you
through prayer and study.

Make your thoughts
my thoughts,
your ways my ways.

Give me the courage to
proclaim your Word
as it is written.

Give me the strength to
be a witness to
everyone I meet.

Give me the faith to
say with St. Paul,
"For to me, life is Christ."

May the work I do in your
name lead others to a deeper
love for you.

Amen.

CATECHETICAL SUNDAY 2005



BEGINNING OF THE YEAR *Life Is Christ*

How can three simple words change your entire life? Ask the young man who hears for the first time the words “I love you” from the woman he loves. Those three words, given and received, can bring two people together for a lifetime commitment, celebrated with the exchange of marriage vows.

On Catechetical Sunday (September 18, 2005), Catholics across the country will be asked to consider three different words that reflect an even deeper, more encompassing love: *Life is Christ*. These words proclaim the reality of the good news of Christ’s abundance, extended to us by God the Father. These, too, are life-changing words.

The Gospel reading for Catechetical Sunday—Matthew 20:1-16a—proclaims this Good News as it recounts the parable of laborers in a vineyard. Some of the workers toiled all day, while others joined later. In the end, each was rewarded with the agreed-upon wage. This parable illustrates for us that the abundance of God’s gifts always exceeds our expectations. Receiving life in Christ through Baptism, we are given a gift far greater than anything we could ever deserve. Such a gift encourages a response from us. An appropriate one is to share this great gift with others through a lifetime of being Jesus’ disciple. As we bring the Year of the Eucharist to a close, we are reminded once again of God’s greatest gift to us. Each time we receive the Eucharist, we share once again in the fullness of the Paschal Mystery.

On Catechetical Sunday, parishes across the nation recognize and commission those men and women who serve the Church as catechists, as they are called to publicly share in the Church’s ministry of handing on the faith. As part of the larger faith community, we give thanks and pray for all who accept this ministry on our behalf. They deserve our prayers and our thanks. However, we must never forget that we also play a critical role in the catechetical process because the “proclamation of the Gospel always begins with the Christian community” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, no. 254).

St. Paul told the Philippians, “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ” (Phil 1:20-21). Paul was saying that from then on everything he would do—his words and actions, his response to life’s challenges—would reflect Christ. Likewise, when we live so that Christ is “magnified” in us, people sense it. Our demeanor, our daily actions, our love, and often our quiet and unseen service to others speak the loudest.

In simple, everyday ways—as a family member and a parishioner; as a friend, a neighbor, and a co-worker—we have the opportunity to respond to God’s abundant gift, to reflect Christ in all we do. This year, let us vow to make of our lives a response that does justice to the Good News contained in those three powerful words *Life is Christ*. In doing so, we open ourselves to possibilities that will change our lives forever, and we proclaim the Good News. That’s what catechists do.