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Catechetical Convocation

*Teaching the Faith:  
Challenges and Opportunities*

by

The Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl, S.T.D.  
Archbishop of Washington

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# TEACHING THE FAITH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

## INTRODUCTION

About a month ago, I had the joyful opportunity to visit one of the high schools in our archdiocese — Bishop McNamara High School. At the end of a gathering of the students, which included the celebration of Mass and a presentation on their part, I was interviewed by a number of people, including the high school newspaper reporter. One of the secular reporters asked me, “What does the Church bring to our society?” The school newspaper reporter asked the same question, but in a more personal manner: “What does the Church bring to me?”

That same question has also been asked of me in a different form by many in the secular press who questioned what my relationship would be to the world of public policy and national political debate.

The answer to these questions is the same. The Church brings to today what it has brought to the world for 2,000 years. It brings us the encounter with Jesus. It offers us an invitation to faith. It proclaims Christ’s words of truth and life. It does this in a world not always prepared to hear and accept the message.

In Saint John’s Gospel we read: “Then many of his disciples who were listening said ‘this saying is hard; who can accept it?’ Jesus said to them: ‘the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life’ ... As a result of this many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, ‘do you also want to leave?’. Simon Peter answered him, ‘Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God’” (Jn 6:60-69).

Some time ago I had the opportunity while visiting a family who are long-standing friends to accompany the father of the family on an outing to the toy store with three of his children aged 2, 4 and 6 years respectively.

Once we got the three of them safely and securely into their car seats we started off on our journey. Before long a discussion broke out in the back seat as the six-year old began to assert his place in the pecking order. The four-year old became more and more agitated. At a certain point he began to use his hands to express himself. At that point his father glancing through the rear view mirror reminded him to “use your words not your hands.” I turned around in the seat to watch this drama unfold and once again the father had to intervene saying a little more firmly this time: “use your words not your hands.”

I watched as frustration mounted in the 4 year old. It was clearly etched all over his face when he replied to his father, “I don’t have those words.”

In a sense, that four-year old is a parable figure for all of us. On our own, we simply do not have the words to enter into the great divine / human dialogue that is Jesus’ revelation and our response in faith. We do not have the words because in our finite human condition we cannot even begin to comprehend the mystery of who God is and what God brings to us. Saint Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians tells us that “we speak God’s wisdom, mysterious, hidden, ... ‘What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what

God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:7, 9)

We turn to Jesus and, therefore, to his Church today in order that we might hear, accept and live the words of spirit and truth—the words of everlasting life. Catechesis/teaching the faith involves introducing people to Christ and his way and, therefore, into a higher level of life and a new way of living.

## **WHAT DO WE BRING? THE WORDS OF SPIRIT AND TRUTH**

Revelation is the account of God speaking to us and providing us the words with which to respond. Our God, who is transcendent, infinite, all powerful, utterly beyond us, spirit, truth, love, freely chose to initiate the conversation that invites us into God’s very life. On our own we cannot respond because we simply do not have the words. But as a part of Jesus’ continuing presence in the world — his Church — we come to learn the words that make the conversation possible.

It all begins with God speaking. “In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe” (Heb 1:1-2).

At the heart of the human encounter with the divine is the communication to us by God of his Word. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us ... so that we might behold the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (cf. Jn 1:1, 14).

Jesus of Nazareth is the Eternal Word who has taken on our human nature so that God might speak to us and we might hear God’s Word in the language, words, gestures, signs and symbols that we are capable of hearing, feeling, grasping and understanding.

On our own we simply do not have the words because we cannot even begin to understand. But it is Christ who comes among us to reveal to us who God is — our Father — and, therefore, who we are. We now no longer have to rely on our words. We have his words.

As Jesus stood before Pilate he made clear his mission: “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth, listens to my voice” (Jn 18:37).

That truth — those human words cradling in their accents and tonality the revelation of God are passed on to us in a living tradition guided and guarded by the Holy Spirit.

This is what we pass on, what we teach. Jesus’ message is lived and passed on in his Church. We are a part of that living continuity with the Gospel, and it is the Church’s message that we proclaim, always guided by the Church.

The night before he died it was Jesus who told his apostles and disciples that he would ask the Father and that the Father would give them another Advocate who would abide with them forever. “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you ... The Advocate, the holy Spirit

that the Father will send in my name — he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (Jn 14:18, 26).

In living continuity since those days, the Church has passed on the words — the words we simply otherwise would not have — that introduce us to Jesus — to the Jesus of Nazareth who is Mary’s son and God’s son, to Jesus who is the *Logos* come among us to speak to us of the inner life of the Father.

It is the Church that continues in remembrance of Jesus both to proclaim his Gospel and also to break the bread and share the cup — the body and blood of the Lord — that makes present to us Christ in his death and resurrection in a way that we can enter and live the mystery.

In answer to the question: What do we bring? We bring Christ in and through his Church.

As we come together today, we confirm that the object of our teaching is Jesus. We share our encounter with both the person of Jesus and his message.

In the rest of this presentation, I want to touch on a number of points:

1. The context of our proclamation today includes:
  - a. A modern culture that increasingly does not know the words, the revelation, the wisdom of God, and does not respond in faith to what Jesus offers because it has not heard those words, and yet at the same time;
  - b. An openness to God, the supernatural, the transcendent, that is so much a part of our culture today even in the face of the extreme secularism and materialism that tends to overwhelm us;
2. The opportunity the Church has today to introduce this generation to the person of Jesus Christ;
3. How do we carry out our ministry?
  - a. Our participation in the Church’s mission,
  - b. Apostolic succession and our connectedness,
  - c. Our warrant to teach;
4. Religious education shares in the living proclamation of the faith. Here I want to touch on:
  - a. Who is responsible for passing on the faith,
  - b. The catechist/teacher as witness,
  - c. Other characteristics of the catechist;
5. The tools that are available to us as we evangelize / catechize / teach.

### **THE CATECHETICAL CONTEXT TODAY**

We are finding that we are dealing with a generation that has not had the opportunity to be introduced into that great dialogue of faith that is Christ speaking to us in and through his Church and our response in loving acceptance and commitment. Too many people simply do not have the words. They have little familiarity with the wisdom of God.

For nearly two decades, we have witnessed an increasing diminishment of the Church in two clearly verifiable areas: participation in the sacramental life of the Church and catechetical preparation sufficient to grasp the central mysteries of the Christian faith.

One of the most significant differences between the '60s, '70s and '80s, and the '90s and this decade is found in the attitude of so many young people. They often do not contest what the Church teaches. They simply do not know it.

### **CURRENT CHALLENGES: THE SECULAR, MATERIAL WORLD**

The context of our proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ is caught up in what is increasingly described as “the American mindset.” That way of looking at life is arguably more individual than communal, more competitive than cooperative and, generally, more self-focused than other-directed. It finds expression in the difficulty of many of our faithful to feel comfortable with the Church that identifies itself as a community that preexists the decision of individual members to bring it into being, a Church that claims to bind conscience, and a Church that expects more from Sunday worship than a warm sense of being comfortable.

Concomitantly, we also witness to some extent the disintegration of the community and social structures that once supported religious faith and encouraged family life. The heavy emphasis on the individual and his or her rights has greatly eroded the concept of the common good and its ability to call people to something beyond themselves. This impacts strongly on our capacity to bring people to accept revealed teaching that cannot be changed by democratic process and to follow an absolute moral imperative that is not the result of prior popular approbation.

There is today, as there has always been to some extent, a temptation by some of the faithful to treat the Church as if it were incidental to salvation. Thus, the acceptance of the teaching authority of Christ exercised by bishops and priests in union with them throughout the world is a “hard saying” today.

Nothing more clearly and succinctly demonstrates the extent of the religious illiteracy among what is increasingly and commonly referred to as the “lost generation,” and perhaps their children, as the report issued several years ago by Archbishop Daniel Buechlein on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ committee to oversee the use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here we find highlighted 10 areas of doctrinal deficiency found in the catechetical materials published in our country and used rather widely in our religious educational efforts. These doctrinal deficiencies create a religious content vacuum in which a great part of the catechetical effort has taken place.

Many have simply drifted away. They do not have an axe to grind. They are not angry with the Church. They just do not know much about the Church and have drifted away from her.

With this lack of catechesis is a diminished — or absent — allegiance to the Church. It is difficult to call people to an understanding of the unchanging nature of revelation and the ability of the Church to bind people in conscience when they do not have an understanding of the antecedent nature of revealed truth and, therefore, moral norms. This presents us a challenge but also an enormous opportunity for the new evangelization.

## POSITIVE ASPECTS — OPENNESS

We are also experiencing, are we not?, that even in the face of a diminished appreciation or understanding of the content of the faith there is a longing of the human spirit for God. Even without knowing the words, our heart longs for the fulfillment only God can give. Paul in writing to the Romans speaks about the law written in our hearts and that our consciences bear witness (cf. Rom 2:15). It seems the further we get from God the more hollow life can be and the more resounding is the echo of words we cannot articulate, but know ring true.

In the very act of creating us, God has written in our hearts a yearning for fullness and completeness that can only be found in God.

It is this yearning that accounts for the uneasiness, sense of unfulfillment and dissatisfaction that characterize the struggle in human life if God and the spiritual dimension of life are excluded. We are all aware that money, self-satisfaction, power and other finite realities can be temporary substitutes and provide us with limited happiness. But we also know that all these things ultimately fail to bring true peace of mind and contentment of soul. It is for this reason that we can say that the beginnings or seeds of faith can be found in the human longing for completion, fulfillment and satisfaction — for God.

In our pastoral experience we often encounter young parents, those who are called to be the first teachers of their children in the ways of the faith, who face their first serious personal catechesis when they themselves are invited to share in the catechetical programs for their children. As lamentable as this situation may be, it is also an extraordinary opportunity. This is a second chance both for them and for us. Many pastors have told me that for them the new evangelization is unfolding on two levels simultaneously: the introduction into the faith of very young children and the instruction of their parents. For so many catechists and catechized, this is a particularly enriching moment because this time around the young adults approach the faith with a great deal more openness and out of their own felt need to know more.

I would submit that the intuition of the *General Directory for Catechesis*, published by the Holy See, and that of our own *National Directory for Catechesis* and the pastoral experience in our country are identical. On the one hand, there is a recognition that our catechesis is in many instances experienced as a first-time invitation to accept and live the faith and, on the other hand, there is the realization that many, many young people are eagerly searching for some spiritual meaning and value in their lives and are, thus, open to an introduction to Christ, his Church and his teaching in a way that perhaps we have not seen in the recent past.

Increasingly, the generation of very young adults today is looking for a faith and teaching presented with clarity and confidence. The so-called “Catholic seekers” are finding a source of confidence and a focus for allegiance in the non-ambiguous presentation of Catholic teaching.

In reaching out to the young, I have experienced their openness, sense of searching and desire for a clear affirmation of the faith. The basic truths of the faith often evoke in them a positive and affirmative response. Often in meetings with young people, whether in a university class setting, an RCIA discussion or a simple conversation about the faith, I find a willingness in many to explore what the Church brings to our world and the human condition that no other voice provides. This openness says to me that it is not a time for any of us to be hesitant to speak about our faith and explain our beliefs.

## FAITH AND CULTURE

We should not be surprised then that chapter one of the *National Directory for Catechesis* deals with the general characteristics of U.S. culture as it addresses the issue of proclaiming the Gospel in the United States. Effort is also made in the newly published *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* to contextualize its teaching in the same manner.

The directory is particularly fluent when it speaks of cultural and ethnic diversity. “Just as all races, ethnicities, and cultures in the world are represented in the population of the United States, so too they find a home within the Catholic Church. Each group brings its own language, history, customs, rituals, and traditions ‘for building up the body of Christ.’ Since persons can only achieve their full humanity by means of culture, the Catholic Church in the United States embraces the rich cultural pluralism of all the faithful, encourages the distinctive identity of each cultural group, and urges mutual enrichment. At the same time, the Catholic Church promotes a unity of faith within the multicultural diversity of the people” (NDC p. 37).

There has never been a time when the Gospel did not encounter challenge. Yet in many instances it significantly converted the culture. The fact that we deal with a new set of circumstances should not in any way diminish our enthusiasm for the Gospel mandate. We are sent to teach all that Christ has taught us knowing that the Spirit will remain with us until the end of time.

### **OPPORTUNITY: OUR ROLE IN THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

It is against this background and these spiritual and temporal realities that we must recognize and define our ministry.

God has spoken to us and we have access to the words to enter into the dialogue.

Even in a culture that denies the need for the dialogue, there is a deep yearning in the human heart for just such a conversation with God.

Our role is to step forward in this society, in this culture, in this community, and speak the words of everlasting life. We need to introduce a whole new generation and their children into the revelation. We have to bring our answer to the question of the young newspaper reporter at Bishop McNamara High School. We bring the story of Jesus. We bring an invitation to faith.

To do this, we need to be confident of our own identity and, therefore, our warrant to speak.

What we have to say, and our claim to be heard, rests on our identity — who we are as members of the Church.

Jesus spoke with authority. They all marveled that unlike the scribes he spoke with authority.

Jesus’ authority came from who he was — the Way, the Truth and the Life.

His authority rested on his identity. So does ours. To the extent that we are members of the Church and participate in the authentic teaching of the Church and her sacramental life, we can be confident voices proclaiming the truth with assurance.

We have all become very familiar with the term “New Evangelization.” Pope John Paul II often highlighted aspects of the New Evangelization which calls upon people, who have at one time in their life heard and accepted the Word of God, to stir again into flame that message.

All around us are people who have some level of familiarity with the Gospel message. Sometimes it is the very comfort level they have with their limited experience of the faith that hinders them from a deeper and richer encounter with Christ, his Gospel and his Church.

The New Evangelization tries through witness, example and word to invite once again to hear “now for the first time” what they may have heard at another time in their life.

At the core of this discussion of the New Evangelization is an attitude that I think we must address head on. As soon as you say, “Let’s talk about our faith,” many people reply, “Oh, I know my religion. I know what the Church teaches.” Yet the more we discuss it the more we find that some people who say they know their faith are really referring to knowledge they received in grade school or elementary CCD programs.

Once I was helping a couple prepare for their wedding. They had asked if I would officiate at it, and so I was instructing them about the sacrament of marriage. It was clear that the man was less than thrilled with the opportunity to review his faith. The young lady, however, was eagerly looking forward to the time to brush up on some aspects of her religious education. At one point, she said to him, “You are not paying attention.” He said, “Aw, I had all this crammed down my throat when I was in grade school.” She replied, “Well, not much of it stuck.”

I thought, “How right on you are.” This fine young man was convinced that he knew all that he needed to know about faith. He was convinced that he understood his religion because he had studied his catechism when he was in grade school. Thanks to the wonderful young woman who is now his wife, he came to see that there is a lot more to faith than a recollection of the responses we memorized as children.

As adults we want to live, act and be nurtured as such. Saint Paul said that as a child you do the things of a child, you are nourished as a child, you play with the toys of a child. But when you become an adult, you put those things aside and assume adult responsibilities (cf. I Cor 13:11). We have to attain now an adult appreciation and understanding of what we believe.

### **OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE CHURCH’S MISSION: OUR AUTHORIZATION**

Our ministry and teaching are in the name of and on behalf of the Church. Our communion with the Church’s teaching office verifies the truth of what we say. It is not ourselves but Jesus Christ we preach. Obviously it is not our word that authenticates what we proclaim. It is the teaching of the Church and our fidelity to it that gives a stamp of integrity to our proclamation.

A good teacher, in addition to proclaiming the Word, is also the living authentication of his or her word’s relationship to the Gospel through its continuity in the Church with Christ.

Apostolic succession is the incarnational means established by Jesus to see that his story is not lost. It is the guarantee of our connectedness.

There is a sequence in which you and I are participants. As Jesus was the Word who came to proclaim it, so we have received the Gospel which gives identity to our lives and calls us to be its heralds.

“Jesus from God, the Apostles from Jesus,  
the Church from the Apostles”

As we have already noted, we live in a societal or cultural context today that is not comfortable with transcendent values, absolute moral norms or the thought of a binding truth that antecedes our approval. There is a sense in which we can say that faith is increasingly extraneous to much of our secular and materially focused world. Our task is to help people see the reason for their faith.

It is one thing to proclaim the faith and to bear witness to it, it is another to help people realize its value and meaning in their lives.

In describing the immense value of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Pope John Paul II, pointed out that it “is offered to every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pt 3:15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes” (*Fidei Depositum*, 4). The catechism is meant to help us understand our faith better so that we in turn can help others accept the truth of our faith. The classical word for this effort is apologetics. It refers to that discipline that is concerned with the defense of or proof for Christianity.

Apologetics does not mean apologizing for something wrong that we have said or done. It is a manner of clearly and reasonably explaining what we believe so that others will want to share the Catholic faith.

## **OUR LIVING PROCLAMATION OF THE FAITH**

Religious education is a lifelong process. By ourselves, we do not know the words. First of all, it begins with the simple recognition that God’s Word, the revelation given to us in Jesus Christ, the truth presented to us in Christ, is utterly beyond us. We on our own cannot attain the truth about God. We do not have on our own those words. It takes an act of humility to recognize this fact. The act of obeying and accepting the Word of God is sometimes described as a genuflection of the will. “I may not fully comprehend the mystery of what you are saying, God, but in humility and recognizing my own limitation, I accept your Word.” “I do not have those words — but I put my faith in your Word — in the Word of your Church.”

## **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PASSING ON THE FAITH?**

How does this happen? Who does all of this? The answer to these questions is why we have gathered here today, all of us together. All of us are a part of the way in which the Church responds to the needs of this generation, the way the Church carries out her mission to teach.

Bishops have the responsibility for the oversight of catechesis and teaching within his diocese. Because the teaching of the Church is rooted in and is an articulation of the teaching of

Christ that has come to us from the apostles, the Church is called “apostolic.” It traces its origins to and maintains its continuity with the apostles through the teaching office of the bishop.

Priests by ordination participate in the teaching ministry of the bishop. It is the task of each priest to pass on the faith. He does this in a multitude of ways, sometimes by direct instruction of the faithful in a teaching setting, but most often by his proclamation of the Word and application of it to daily life that is a part of the Liturgy of the Word.

Deacons also are ordained to proclaim the Word and are, thus, called to publicly proclaim the Gospel and, from time to time, to offer a homily.

But in addition to ordination, there is also delegation and designation. Teachers, catechists, volunteers, all of you who are here today, for the most part, share in the teaching ministry of this archdiocesan church by your designation as a teacher or commissioning as a catechist. By delegation, you are a visible part of the Church’s teaching ministry.

Of course parents, the first teachers of their children, have their own obligations to the faith and to their children. Theirs is not a delegation but a natural obligation to instruct their children in the life-giving ways of the faith.

In parishes I am also greatly heartened by the recognition of more and more of the faithful that the work of catechesis is not confined or reserved solely to clergy, catechists and teachers. Increasingly there is an affirmation of the principles articulated in the *General Directory for Catechesis* that “catechesis is a responsibility of the entire Christian community.” The same directory instructs us that “Christian initiation indeed ‘should not be the work of catechists and priests alone, but of the whole community of the faithful’ ” (220).

The entire faith community must be invited into both the recognition that there is a need to evangelize and catechize and also the commitment to participate in this effort. This is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the catechetical renewal today. All of us together must assume responsibility for sharing with others the faith that we have received and so cherish.

Scripture tells us at a certain point Jesus began to teach and to do. Gradually people came to understand who He was and what His message was. So it is for the witnesses of Jesus today.

### **CATECHIST/TEACHER AS WITNESS**

The catechist, through his/her words and deeds, bears witness to Jesus, tells the story of Jesus, lives the story of Jesus. Teacher is an ancient and well-honored title. The teacher is the storyteller of the faith family. He or she passes on the collective memory of the community so that each generation can benefit from the living faith of the past generations. Otherwise, each generation has to begin from zero. This, in the world of faith, is impossible because Jesus does not repeat the original incarnation for each new age. He relies on his Church — his new body.

We begin to share when we tell others of Jesus. We live and talk in such a manner that the truth of what we proclaim inspires others to accept and follow the Lord. This is the primary role of the catechist — to tell the story of Jesus with such conviction and with such witness power that others want to follow him. Faith begins with this witness.

Yet this proclamation of the kingdom of God is more than personal enthusiasm. It is anchored in the knowledge that Christ has died and that Christ has risen. Hence, the creed. It is the summary of our faith. Faith is a response to someone we have come to know. Knowledge is, therefore, an essential, integral part of faith. We come to know Christ as a reality and decide to follow him and his way. Without the knowledge of who he is and what he wants us to do, we cannot approach the moment when we willingly and lovingly say yes to him.

Witness to the faith necessarily involves content. The creed is the summary of who Jesus is and what he does. It is the framework for the passing on of the story. In recent years there have been splendid developments in the Church's expression of her faith. A contemporary catechist must take into account the wealth of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the living experiences of the liturgy and the concern for sacred Scripture, as well as the fresh emphasis on ecumenism and the social requirements of the Gospel.

Tradition, Scripture and the living *magisterium*, with the presence of the Spirit guiding the faithful to be open to the truth, are all gifts of God. The close union of these gifts cannot be forgotten. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recalls for us, sacred Scripture, tradition and the *magisterium* of the Church, in accord with God's wise design, are so linked that each in its own way under the action of the Holy Spirit contributes effectively to the salvation of souls (cf. 95).

When we reflect on the role of bishops in the Church and, therefore, the *magisterium* or teaching office, I think it important to note that there is a renewed appreciation, particularly among some of our Protestant brothers and sisters, for the stability that the *magisterium* provides the Church.

Authentic Catholic faith is never partial or selective. It is always universal. We say yes to the whole mystery of the faith and to each of its elements because of our personal faith in God. We believe the truth that God reveals because we believe God, and we believe that God is still teaching in and through the Church. When Peter came to recognize that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, he was prepared to believe any word of Christ, for it was clear to him that God is always to be believed. "You have the word of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68-69).

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER/CATECHIST**

The catechist as the living witness to the kingdom of God is identified by specific characteristics. The catechist is a believer, knows the faith, lives the faith and communicates the faith.

Obviously, since faith is a living reality and experience of Jesus, only a believer can communicate that faith to another. The content of the faith is so much more than a theological discipline. It is the living word of God communicated heart to heart.

The catechist knows the faith. Since there is a content to the Gospel message that is passed on from age to age, it is necessary that the catechist know well the story not just in broad outline but in intimate detail. The story of Jesus is not the dead letter of a printed page but the living word alive in the Church nourished and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Gospel of Jesus includes the living tradition of the Church as the Church has experienced Jesus in our midst.

The catechist lives the faith — lives for Christ. The invitation to others to accept our witness must be based not only on what we say, but on what we do. More powerful than our words are our actions and how we live our words. The silent pedagogy of our lives is a powerful part of catechetical witness.

Somehow, in everything we are and do, others must come to see in us our certainty that our life has meaning, joy and fulfillment because we live now what will be entirely complete in the blessed vision of God. “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor 2:9; cf. Isa 64:3).

## CATECHETICAL TOOLS

What tools are available to us as we try to carry on our task? We are in a moment of redirection of catechesis in the United States. We have the instruments that can make this catechetical revival and renewal effective. Among the practical tools for catechetical and educational renewal are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the *General Directory for Catechesis* and their derivatives and applications within our own country: the *National Directory for Catechesis* and the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*.

With the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops established a committee to oversee its use. This resulted in an invitation to the publishers of catechetical tools to have their materials reviewed for conformity with the catechism. The outcome was positive and led to the redoing of a great number of catechetical texts. Today most publishing houses have joined in the review process and can boast of materials judged to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The bishops determined that one area still required attention. There was a noticeable absence of appropriate catechetical materials for many young adults, participants in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and those in parish and diocesan adult faith formation programs. Thus, the bishops set out to produce a catechism that would be inviting, engaging and instructive. The goal was to have a catechism for adults that would be complete but not necessarily encyclopedic, authentic in its content and, at the same, presented in a format that would appeal to young adult readers and learners today.

The result of this effort is the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. It is the first catechetical text produced by the bishops themselves since the catechism of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884.

Later this morning, Monsignor Daniel Kutys, Associate Secretary of Education and Director of the Office of Catechesis for the Conference of Bishops, will speak about this remarkable and highly useful catechetical tool.

In 1971 in response to the catechetical needs of the Church, the Vatican office for catechesis, the Congregation for the Clergy, published the first general catechetical directory. Eight years later, the Conference of Bishops published a national directory entitled *Sharing the Light of Faith*.

In 1997, the Holy See provided a new directory, the *General Directory for Catechesis*. In 2005, the bishops published an adaptation of that directory for our country. The National Directory for Catechesis provides guidelines and assistance for all of us as we attempt to pass on

the Good News of Christ. Later today as well, Marie Scanlon, from the bishops' Office of Catechesis, will speak on the theme of the national directory. She was engaged in the development of this directory from the beginning and is a highly qualified commentator on this significant work.

All of these tools not only focus our ministry for us but strengthen our claim to be authentic voices for Christ and his Church.

One of the adjectives we use to describe the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its derivative, the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, is “authoritative” or “authentic.” Both of these words have the same Latin root *autoritas*, which means that the teaching is more than opinion — it has authority.

### **WHEN ARE WE TO ENGAGE IN THIS MINISTRY? OUR TURN “NOW”**

This is a new moment for catechesis in our country. It is a time to focus clearly on the proclamation of authentic Catholic faith, to do so in a manner that is unambiguous, and to recognize that we are speaking to an audience — many of whom are hearing the authentic faith for the first time — and a large portion of whom are open to hearing the teaching of the Church.

We live in an age of hope. This is not a groundless euphoria but, rather, a confidence that God continues to grace the Church with opportunities to reach deep within our own lived experience of Jesus to find the practical means to introduce a whole new generation into the knowledge — into the encounter with the living Lord.

### **CONCLUSION**

Before concluding I want to express my profound gratitude to all of you who are a part of the catechetical initiative. While it is challenging, it is also a great joy to be caught up in the effort of the Church to introduce people to Christ — to help people encounter the living Lord.

We need to support one another, strengthen the ministry of one another and rejoice in our effort as the Church, in all her array of orders, ministries and services, to work together as one so that we are one voice proclaiming one faith in one Lord.

The pope's words, his challenge, at the beginning of the millennium echoed his words when he celebrated on the *Sagrato* of Saint Peter's Basilica his first Mass as the newly elected pope. That homily and his words have become a mantra for the whole Church.

He called on all of us to open wide our hearts to Christ. He pleaded with us: “Do not be afraid, open your hearts to Christ.”

Twenty-three years later as he concluded the celebration of the great millennium, Jubilee 2000, he called upon all of us once again fearlessly to set out into the deep — *duc in altum*.

We can do that. We can courageously and without fear step out into the deep and proclaim the message of Christ. This the Church has always done with confidence and assurance because we know that even in the face of difficulty we can joyfully, confidently and lovingly articulate and share the words that give life.

Thanks to Christ and thanks to his Church, you and I, we have the words.

Let us never be hesitant and let us always rejoice to share those words, to model the faith in our lives, to proclaim the good news of Christ and to invite those entrusted to our care to the celebration of the Eucharist.

Through all of us, may those entrusted to our care come to hear, embrace and love the message:

Christ has died.  
Christ is risen.  
Christ will come again.

Thank you.