

Directory for Catechesis

Chapter VIII CATECHESIS IN THE LIVES OF PERSONS

224. Every one of the baptised, called to the maturity of faith, has the right to adequate catechesis. It is therefore the Church's task to respond to this in a satisfactory manner. The Gospel is not intended for humanity in the abstract, but for each human being, real, concrete, historical, rooted in a particular situation and marked by psychological, social, cultural, and religious dynamics, because "each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption"¹³. For one thing, faith is not a linear process and it participates in the development of the person, and this in turn influences the journey of faith. It cannot be forgotten that every phase of life is exposed to specific challenges and must confront the ever-new dynamics of the Christian vocation.

225. It is therefore reasonable to offer pathways of catechesis that vary based on the participants' different needs, ages and states of life. So it is indispensable to respect anthropological-developmental and theological pastoral realities, taking into account the educational sciences. This is why it is pedagogically important, in the process of catechesis, to attribute to each stage its own importance and specificity. Just a few general elements are indicated here in this regard, whilst referring the reader to the catechetical directories of the particular Churches and of the episcopal conferences for further considerations.

1. CATECHESIS AND THE FAMILY

226. The family is a community of love and of life, made up of "a complex of interpersonal relationships ... - married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity - through which each human person is introduced into the 'human family' and into the 'family of God,' which is the Church"¹⁴. The future of persons and of the human and ecclesial communities depends to a large extent on the family, the basic cell of society. Thanks to the family, the Church becomes a *family of families* and is enriched with the life of these domestic churches. Therefore, "with inner joy and deep comfort, the Church looks to the families who remain faithful to the teachings of the Gospel, encouraging them and thanking them for the testimony they offer. For they bear witness, in a credible way, to the beauty of marriage as indissoluble and perpetually faithful"¹⁵.

Areas of family catechesis

Catechesis in the family

227. *The family is a proclamation of faith* in that it is the natural place in which faith can be lived in a simple and spontaneous manner. It "has an unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values. On this human base, Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator. It is, indeed, a

Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured into periods”¹⁶.

228. Conjugal and family life, lived according to God’s plan, constitutes in itself a Gospel in which God’s gratuitous and patient love for humanity can be read. By virtue of the sacrament of marriage, Christian spouses participate in the mystery of unity and of fruitful love that exists between Christ and the Church. *Catechesis in the family* therefore has the task of revealing to those who take part in family life, above all to the spouses and parents, the gift that God gives to them through the sacrament of marriage.

Catechesis with the family

229. *The Church proclaims the Gospel to the family.* The Christian community is a *family of families* and is itself the family of God. Community and family are, each for the other, a constant and reciprocal point of reference: while the community receives from the family an understanding of the faith that is immediate and connected in a natural way to the affairs of life, the family in turn receives from the community an explicit key for using faith to reinterpret its experience. Aware of this profound connection, the Church, in her devotion to evangelisation, proclaims the Gospel to families, showing them by experience that this is “joy that ‘fills hearts and lives’, because in Christ we have been ‘set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness”¹⁷.

230. At the present time, *catechesis with families* is permeated by the kerygma, because even “in and among families, the Gospel message should always resound; the core of that message, the *kerygma*, is what is most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. This message has to occupy the centre of all evangelising activity”¹⁸. Moreover, in the dynamic of missionary conversion *catechesis with families* is characterised by a style of humble understanding and by a proclamation that is concrete, not theoretical and detached from personal problems. The community, in its efforts to bring evangelisation and catechesis into families, marks out paths of faith that should help them to have a clear awareness of their own identity and mission: it therefore accompanies and supports them in their task of transmitting life, helps them in the exercise of their inherent duty of education, and promotes an authentic family spirituality. In this way the family is made aware of its role and becomes, in the community and along with it, an active participant in the work of evangelisation.

The catechesis of the family

231. *The family proclaims the Gospel.* As a domestic church founded on the sacrament of marriage that also has a missionary dimension, the Christian family takes part in the Church’s mission of evangelisation and is therefore an agent of catechesis. “The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelising mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle”¹⁹. In addition to its natural service of child-rearing, the family is therefore called to contribute to building up the Christian community and to bear witness to the Gospel in society. “The ministry of evangelisation and catechesis of the Church of the home is rooted in and derives from the one mission of the Church and

is ordained to the upbuilding of the one Body of Christ, it must remain in intimate communion and collaborate responsibly with all the other evangelising and catechetical activities present and at work in the ecclesial community at the diocesan and parochial levels.”²⁰ *The catechesis of the family* is therefore every specific contribution that Christian families make, with the sensibility proper to them, to the various journeys of faith that the community proposes.

Pastoral guidelines

232. In her motherly concern the Church accompanies her children throughout their entire lifespan. She recognises however that some moments are decisive passages in which people more readily allow themselves to be touched by God’s grace and become open to making a journey of faith. Along these paths it is appropriate to make use of the generous and valuable help of other couples with long-standing experience in marriage. The community is to be more attentive to the moments of accompaniment indicated here.

a. *The catechesis of young people and adults who are preparing for marriage*²¹ provides for formation well in advance, as the time approaches, and immediately before the celebration of the sacrament of marriage, which is presented as a true vocation. On these journeys of faith, gradual and continuous, following the inspiration of the catechumenate, “priority should be given – along with a renewed proclamation of the *kerygma* – to an attractive and helpful presentation of information that can help couples to live the rest of their lives together [...] a kind of ‘initiation’ to the sacrament of matrimony, providing couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family”²². It is a good idea to stop using the name, where it is still in use, of *marriage preparation courses*, in order to restore to this journey its authentic meaning of formation and catechesis.

b. *The catechesis of young married couples*²³ is the catechesis offered in mystagogic form to new spouses after marriage, in order to lead them to the discovery of what they have become thanks to the sacrament that has been celebrated. It is good for these formative journeys, in the light of the word of God, to guide the lives of young couples in such a way that they may become ever more aware of the gift and mission they have received.

c. *The catechesis of parents who are asking to have their children baptised*: the community, in the person of the catechists, should take care to welcome, listen to, and understand the reasons for the parents’ request, and provide an appropriate pathway for them to reawaken the grace of the gift of faith that they have received. It is also good for the godparents to be involved in this journey, and to provide adequate time for it to unfold.

d. *The catechesis of parents whose children are making the journey of Christian initiation*: the community fosters the involvement of parents in their children’s journey of initiation, which for some of them is a moment to deepen their faith and for others is an authentic space for its first proclamation.

e. *Intergenerational catechesis* envisions the journey of faith as a formative experience not aimed at a particular age group but shared among different generations within a family or a

community, on the pathway marked out by the liturgical year. This initiative makes the most of the exchange of the experience of faith among the generations, taking inspiration from the first Christian communities.

f. *Catechesis in groups of spouses and in groups of families* is carried out by the married couples themselves. These journeys of catechesis are intended to develop a conjugal and family spirituality capable of restoring strength and vitality to married life, rediscovering the spousal dimension of the covenant between God and humanity and the role of the family in building the kingdom of God.

New family scenarios

233. The precariousness and unpredictability of the social and cultural processes underway have changed, among other things, even the notion and reality of the family. There is a tremendous increase in conjugal and family crises, which are often resolved by giving “rise to new relationships, new couples, new civil unions, and new marriages, creating family situations which are complex and problematic for the Christian life”²⁴. In spite of the wounds, the depletion of its transcendent significance, and the weaknesses that characterise it, there is however a sort of nostalgia for the family, since there are so many who, intuiting its value, are still seeking it and want to build it.

234. With concern, respect, and pastoral solicitude the Church wants to accompany those children who are marked by a wounded love, who find themselves in the most fragile condition, restoring their trust and hope. “Following this divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner: she seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good, to take loving care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work.”²⁵ It is important that every Christian community take a realistic view of the heterogeneous family realities, with their ups and downs, for the sake of *accompanying them* in an adequate way and *discerning* the complexity of the situations, without giving in to forms of idealism and pessimism. In essence “it is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy”²⁶.

235. Accompanying in the faith and introducing into community life the situations referred to as *irregular* therefore “entails taking seriously each person and God’s plan for his or her life”²⁷ with a style of togetherness, listening and understanding. In addition to personal spiritual accompaniment, catechists should find ways and means to foster the participation of these brothers in catechesis as well, in specific groups made up of persons who share the same conjugal or family experience or in other pre-existing groups of families or adults. In this way it is possible to avoid forms of solitude or discrimination

¹³ John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Redemptor hominis* (4th March 1979)

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris consortio* (22nd November 1981), 15.

¹⁵ AL 86.

¹⁶ GDC 255.

¹⁷ AL 200; cf also EG 1.

¹⁸ AL 58; cf see EG 35 and 164.

¹⁹ AL 289.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris consortio* (22nd November 1981), 53.

²¹ Cf AL 205-216.

²² AL 207.

²³ Cf AL 217-230.

²⁴ AL 41.

²⁵ AL 78.

²⁶ AL 297.

²⁷ EG 160.