

## Directory for Catechesis

### Chapter VIII: CATECHESIS IN THE LIVES OF PERSONS

#### 6. CATECHESIS WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

269. The Church's solicitude for persons with disabilities springs from God's way of acting. Following the principle of the incarnation of the Son of God, who makes himself present in every human situation, the Church recognises in persons with disabilities the call to faith and to a life that is good and full of meaning. The theme of disability is of great importance for evangelisation and Christian formation. Communities are called not only to take care of the most fragile, but to recognise the presence of Jesus who in a special way manifests himself in them. This "calls for twofold attention: an awareness of the possibility to educate in the faith the people with even grave or very grave disabilities; and a willingness to consider them as active subjects in the community in which they live"<sup>1</sup>. At the cultural level, unfortunately, there is a widespread conception of life, often narcissistic and utilitarian, that does not grasp the manifold human and spiritual richness in persons with disabilities, forgetting that vulnerability belongs to the essence of humanity and does not prevent happiness and self-realisation<sup>2</sup>.

270. Persons with disabilities are a growth opportunity for the ecclesial community, which by their presence is prompted to overcome cultural prejudices. Disability, in fact, can create embarrassment because it draws attention to difficulties in welcoming diversity; It can also elicit fear, especially if it is marked by a character of permanence, because it is a reference to everyone's radical situation of fragility, which is suffering and ultimately death. Precisely because they are witnesses to the essential truths of human life, persons with disabilities must be welcomed as a great gift. The community, enriched by their presence, becomes more aware of the salvific mystery of the cross of Christ and, in living reciprocal relationships of welcoming and solidarity, becomes a source of good in life and a reminder for the world. Catechesis is therefore to help the baptised to interpret the mystery of human suffering in the light of the death and resurrection of Christ.

271. It is the task of the local Churches to be open to the reception and ordinary presence of persons with disabilities within programmes of catechesis, working for a *culture of inclusion* against the logic of the disposable. Persons with intellectual disabilities live out their relationship with God in the immediacy of their intuition, and it is necessary and ennobling to accompany them in the life of faith. This requires that catechists seek new channels of communication and methods more suitable for fostering the encounter with Jesus. It is therefore useful to employ experiential dynamics and languages that involve the five senses and narrative methods capable of involving all the participants in a personal and meaningful way. For this service it is a good idea for some catechists to receive a specific formation. Catechists should also be close to the families of persons with disabilities, accompanying them and fostering their full incorporation into the community. The openness to life of these families is a witness that deserves great respect and admiration<sup>3</sup>.

272. Persons with disabilities are called to the fulness of sacramental life, even in the presence of severe disorders. The sacraments are gifts from God, and the liturgy, even before being rationally understood, needs to be lived: therefore no one can refuse the sacraments to persons with disabilities. The community that is able to discover the beauty and joy of faith of which these brothers are capable becomes richer. Pastoral inclusion and involvement in liturgical action, especially on Sundays<sup>4</sup>, is therefore important. Persons with disabilities can become adept in the lofty dimension of the faith that includes sacramental life, prayer, and the proclamation of the word. In fact, they are not only recipients of catechesis, but participants in evangelisation. It is desirable that they themselves should be catechists and, with their testimony, transmit the faith in a more effective way.

1. *Francis, Address to participants in the convention for persons with disabilities (11<sup>th</sup> June 2016).*

2. *Cf Francis, Address to participants in the conference "Catechesis and persons with disabilities" (21<sup>st</sup> October 2017)*

3. *Cf AL 47.*

4 *Cf Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation Sacramentum caritatis (22<sup>nd</sup> February 2007), 58.*