

The Pope To Catechists: Do Not Be Afraid Of Going Beyond Your Boundaries – God Is Already There

THE POPE TO CATECHISTS: DO NOT BE AFRAID OF GOING BEYOND YOUR BOUNDARIES – GOD IS ALREADY THERE



Vatican City, 28 September 2013 (VIS) - “Catechesis is a pillar for education in faith. ... Even though at times it may be difficult, it is necessary to work hard and make efforts for which you don't always see the results you hoped for, educating in faith is good! It is perhaps the best legacy we can give: faith! ... Catechesis is a vocation: 'being' a catechist, this is the vocation, not 'working' as a catechist. Be careful: I have not said to do the work of a catechist, but rather to be one, because it involves all your life. It means guiding towards the encounter with Jesus with words and with life, with your witness ... I like to recall the words of St. Francis of Assisi to his friars: 'Always preach the Gospel, and if necessary, use words', so that people may see the Gospel in your lives ... we must begin with Christ and this love He gives us”.

With these words Pope Francis greeted the participants in the International Congress on Catechesis promoted on the occasion of the Year of Faith by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, whom he received in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall.

To start again from Christ, the Pope indicated three stages, “like the old Jesuits ... one, two, three!”, he said. “First of all, ... it means being familiar with Him: Jesus insisted on this to disciples at the Last Supper, when he prepared himself to live the greatest gift of love, his sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus used the image of the vine and its branches, and said: stay in my love, stay attached to me, just as the branch is attached to the vine. If we remain united to Him, we can bear fruit, and this is familiarity with Him. ... The first thing, for a disciple, is to stay with the Master, to listen to Him, to learn from Him. ... I ask you: how are you in the presence of the Lord? When you go to the Lord, you look at the Tabernacle, what do you do? Without words ... But I say, I say, I think, I reflect, I feel ... Very good! But do you let the Lord look at you? To let ourselves be watched by the Lord. He watches us and this is a form of prayer. ... If in our hearts there is not the warmth of God, of His love, of His tenderness, how can we, poor sinners, warm the hearts of others?”

To explain the second stage, Francis said that starting again from Christ means “imitating Him in coming out of oneself and going towards others. This is a beautiful experience, if somewhat paradoxical. Because the person who puts Christ at the centre of his life is off-centre. The more you unite with Jesus and make Him the centre of your life, the more He makes you abandon yourself, decentralise yourself, and open yourself to others. This is the true dynamism of love, this is the movement of God Himself! God is the centre, but is always the gift of oneself, relations, life that is communicated. ... In the heart of the catechist, there always exists this ‘systolic-diastolic’ movement: union with Jesus; encounter with the other. If at one of these two movements is no longer beating, then you do not live. It receives the gift of kerygma, and offers it as a gift in turn”.

The third element “follows the same line: starting again from Christ means not being afraid to go with Him to the peripheries. Here I think of the story of Jonah, a truly interesting figure, especially in our times of change and incertitude. Jonas was a pious man, with a calm and orderly life; this led him to have very clear mental framework and to judge everything and everyone accordingly, in a rigid fashion. ... Therefore, when the Lord called on him to go and preach in the great pagan city of Nineveh, Jonas did not feel like doing this. 'Go there? But I have all the truth here!' ... Nineveh was outside his way of thinking and at the periphery of his world. And so he ran away and boarded a boat”.

The story of Jonah “teaches us not to be afraid of going outside our ways of thinking in order to follow God, because God always goes beyond. ... God is not afraid! ...God is not afraid of the peripheries. If you go to the peripheries, you will find Him there. God is always faithful and creative, ... and creativity is the pillar of being a catechist. God is creative, He is not closed, and for this reason He is never rigid. God is not rigid! He welcomes us, He comes towards us, He understands us. To be faithful, to be creative, it is necessary to know how to change. ... If a catechist allows himself to be conquered by fear, he is a coward; if he is not calm, he ends up as a statue in a museum. ... What I want to say now, I have already said many times before, but it comes from my heart to say it again. When we Christians are closed in our group, in our movement, in our parish, in our own environment, we remain closed and what happens to us is what happens to whatever remains closed: when a room is closed the odour of humidity gathers. And if a person is closed in that room, they become ill! When a Christian is closed in his group, or parish, or movement, he remains closed and becomes ill. If a Christian goes out into the streets, in the peripheries, what may befall him is what happens to many people on the street: an accident. We have seen many road accidents. But I say to you: I prefer a thousand times over a Church afflicted by accidents rather than a sick Church!”

“Jesus did not say: go out and get by. No, he didn't say that! Jesus said, go, I am with you! This is our beauty and our strength: if we go, if we go to bring the Gospel with love, with true apostolic spirit, with boldness and candidness, He walks with us, He goes before us. ... When we think of going far away, to an extreme periphery, and perhaps when we are a little afraid, in reality He is already there: Jesus awaits us in the heart of that brother, in his wounded flesh, in his oppressed life, in his soul without faith”.

V.I.S.