Proclaiming Jesus Christ:

Catechesis in the Catechumenate

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
—John 14:6

In this session you will learn about:

- Communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ as the definitive aim of catechesis.
- The components of a suitable catechesis in the catechumenate as:
  - Systematic and hierarchical
  - Organic
  - Complete but not exhaustive
  - Driven by scripture
  - Telling the story of the Father’s loving plan of salvation
  - Liturgical
  - Connected to life experience
The Mystery of Christ: The Definitive Aim of Catechesis

“Accordingly, the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.”
—CT 5

• The Catechumenate is the period when the participants receive formal and complete catechesis of the entire Catholic faith.

• This should include knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, and teaching how to pray (GDC 85).

• Initiatory catechesis that is proper to the catechumenate is described by the GDC, article 66:

The aim of catechetical activity consists in precisely this: to encourage a living, explicit and fruitful profession of faith. The Church, in order to achieve this, transmits to catechumens and those to be catechized, her living experience of the Gospel, her faith, so that they may appropriate and profess it. Hence, “authentic catechesis is always an orderly and systematic initiation into the revelation that God has given of himself to humanity in Christ Jesus, a revelation stored in the depths of the Church’s memory and in Sacred Scripture, and constantly communicated from one generation to the next by a living active traditio.”

• A suitable catechesis is:

□ Gradual and complete

□ Accommodated to the liturgical year

□ Biblical and liturgical

□ Oriented toward “a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate” (RCIA 75.1)
II. The Components of a Suitable Catechesis

I. SYSTEMATIC AND HIERARCHICAL

• Catechesis must be presented according to the hierarchy of truths that are intrinsically part of the revelation of Christ.

• Some truths need to be presented and understood first before others.

• The mystery of the Holy Trinity and the saving revelation and actions of Christ are at the center. The presentation must always be centered on the person of Christ, or Christocentric.

“This message transmitted by catechetics has a ‘comprehensive hierarchical character’, which constitutes a coherent and vital synthesis of the faith. This is organized around the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, in a Christocentric perspective, because this is ‘the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them’. Starting with this point, the harmony of the overall message requires a ‘hierarchy of truths’, in so far as the connection between each one of these and the foundation of the faith differs. Nevertheless, this hierarchy ‘does not mean that some truths pertain to Faith itself less than others, but rather that some truths are based on others as of a higher priority and are illumined by them’.” —GDC 114

• Therefore, there is an intrinsic systematic pedagogy in divine revelation and the Deposit of Faith, with the Trinity and Christ at the center.

• The Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed are excellent examples of this pedagogy of the faith.

• The Deposit of Faith is a story of the Father’s loving plan of salvation hierarchical and systematic catechesis tells this great story.
2. ORGANIC

- Organic means that catechesis should show that all the doctrines and dogmas revealed by Christ and handed on by the Church are intrinsically interconnected.

- Failure to present this intrinsic interconnection presents the false idea that any single doctrine or truth can be removed or ignored without any consequence.

- One doctrine cannot be separated or isolated from all the others without the violent destruction of the whole.

- Examples:
  - The connections between the truths about Mary and the truths about Christ: To deny the Immaculate Conception, or the Virginity of Mary, or Mary as the Mother of God would be to deny the intrinsic truths about who Christ is.
  - The connections between the Sacrament of Marriage as a sign of Christ’s love for the Church, and the truths about human sexuality as the spouses’ preeminent and total living out of that sign. Without these organic and intrinsic connections, it becomes easy for one to dismiss the Church’s teachings on sexuality.

3. COMPLETE BUT NOT EXHAUSTIVE

- Catechesis should present all of the essential dogmas, doctrines, and teachings of the Church. As Blessed Pope John Paul II teaches:

“In order that the sacrificial offering of his or her faith should be perfect, the person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive “the word of faith” not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor. Unfaithfulness on some point to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis is and putting at risk the results that Christ and the ecclesial community have a right to expect from it… What kind of catechesis would it be that failed to give their full place to man’s creation and sin; to God’s plan of redemption and its long, loving preparation and realization; to the incarnation of the Son of God; to Mary, the Immaculate One, the Mother of God, ever Virgin, raised body and soul to the glory of heaven, and to her role in the mystery of salvation; to the mystery of lawlessness at work in our lives and the power of God freeing us from it; to the need for penance and asceticism; to the sacramental and liturgical actions; to the reality of the Eucharistic Presence; to participation in divine life here and hereafter, and so on? Thus, no true catechist can lawfully, on his own initiative, make a selection of what he considers important in the deposit of faith as opposed to what he considers unimportant, so as to teach the one and reject the other.” —CT 30
• Complete does not mean exhaustive.
• Excellent resources and tools help us:
  - The Creed
  - Pope Paul VI: Credo of the People of God
  - The Catechism of the Catholic Church
  - The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church
  - The United Stated Catholic Catechism for Adults
• We also need to make the distinction between catechesis and theology.

  Catechesis is the handing on of the data of the faith. This is what we do, and only do in RCIA. Theology is a reflection upon what the Church teaches and believes for further study and understanding.

  We are not doing theology in the RCIA!

4. DRIVEN BY SCRIPTURE

• Sacred Scripture as the Word of God should be the foundation of catechesis.

• As Blessed Pope John Paul II states:

  “To speak of Tradition and Scripture as the source of catechesis is to draw attention to the fact that catechesis must be impregnated and penetrated by the thought, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; but it is also a reminder that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the intelligence and the heart of the Church and for drawing inspiration from the 2,000 years of the Church’s reflection and life.” —CT 27

• Scripture will appeal to those coming from a sola scriptura background.

• Example: Scripture drives the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
5. TELLS THE STORY OF THE FATHER’S LOVING PLAN OF SALVATION

• Participants must also have a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate.

• Catechesis must bring them into an intimate knowledge and doctrine in the plan of salvation.

• Every typology should always be presented in the context of the Father’s loving plan.

• Biblical typology is especially important in presenting each doctrine in light of the Father’s plan of salvation.

6. LITURGICAL

• There should be an emphasis and effort to bring participants into a real and true understanding of the liturgy and form them to be active participants in the liturgical life of the Church.

• Catechesis in the catechumenate should be accommodated to the Liturgical Year.

• Participants must have an intimate knowledge and understanding of the liturgical rites.

• Catechesis leads to the sacraments, but the sacraments themselves are catechetical. As Blessed Pope John Paul II teaches:

“In the early Church, the catechumenate and preparation for the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist were the same thing. Although in the countries that have long been Christian the Church has changed her practice in this field, the catechumenate has never been abolished; on the contrary, it is experiencing a renewal in those countries and is abundantly practiced in the young missionary Churches. In any case, catechesis always has reference to the sacraments. On the one hand, the catechesis that prepares for the sacraments is an eminent kind, and every form of catechesis necessarily leads to the sacraments of faith. On the other hand, authentic practice of the sacraments is bound to have a catechetical aspect. In other words, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in the sacramental practice.”

—CT 23
• There are two fundamental ways of teaching the liturgy:

□ Teaching TO the Rites:
This involves teaching the rite itself—the meaning, signs, words, responses, the grace imparted—to allow the participants to respond with conviction.

□ Teaching FROM the Rites:
This involves presenting the truths of the faith from what the Rite itself reveals to us—what the Rite is teaching us about Christ, what he desires for us, his plan of salvation, and our participation in it.

• Liturgical catechesis is not the same as lectionary-based catechesis:

□ Lectionary-based catechesis is an attempt to use the lectionary as the basis for doctrinal catechesis. However, the lectionary was never intended by the Church to be used as the framework for providing systematic catechesis.

7. CONNECTED TO LIFE EXPERIENCE

• Catechesis in the catechumenate must be made relevant to the daily lives of the participants.

“Catechesis, in presenting the Christian message, not only shows who God is and what his saving plan is, but, as Jesus himself did, it reveals man to man and makes him more aware of his sublime vocation. Revelation, in fact, ‘...is not... isolated from life or artificially juxtaposed to it. It is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and it illumines the whole of life with the light of the Gospel, to inspire it or to question it.’” —GDC 116

• Catechists should connect the truths they are teaching to life experience.

□ Catechists must be willing to give personal testimonies.

□ Catechists must also be a living witness to the faith.

□ Pope Paul VI: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” —EN 41
III. PLANNING A CATECHETICAL SESSION

There are many ways to prepare and lead a catechetical session. One particularly effective method is called the Ecclesial Method, which was developed by Msgr. Francis Kelly. Below is an example of a 90 minute catechetical session:

1. PREPARATION (10 MINUTES)

☐ This first step in any catechetical session prepares the hearts and minds of the participants to encounter Christ. It is a transition from the “world” to the “sacred.”

☐ This includes an opening prayer or a Celebration of the Word using Scriptures chosen to fit the catechetical theme. The participants are prepared for encounter with Scripture through the grace of prayer.

☐ Preparation also includes the meeting space being arranged in such a way that it invites participants to encounter Christ. A sacred space is highly recommended (table with a crucifix, a Bible, a candle, etc.).

2. PROCLAMATION (5 MINUTES)

☐ After the participants are prepared, the catechist proclaims the particular truth that will be unveiled in the catechetical session.

☐ The proclamation is a short but bold proclamation that contains the “heart” of the truth that will be taught.

3. EXPLANATION (45 MINUTES)

☐ The catechist then gives an explanation of the particular teaching using all the catechetical components discussed earlier.
4. APPLICATION (20 MINUTES)

➢ Once the teaching is broken open and explained, the participants must be given the opportunity to apply it to their daily life and call them to conversion.

➢ This can be done in a variety of ways such as small group discussion, personal meditation, someone giving a testimony, etc. However, the goal should not only be gaining understanding, but ultimately calling the participants to conversion and a deeper encounter with Christ.

5. CELEBRATION (10 MINUTES)

➢ The final step is allowing the participants to respond with grace through prayer, Scripture, song, etc. This allows the grace of Christ to penetrate their lives to more perfectly accept and live the good news that they have received.

“The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends. Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope, or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see the all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love.”

—CCC 25
PARISH DISCUSSION/ASSESSMENT:

What are we doing well?
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What needs to be improved?
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Questions or action items for further implementation:
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