

The Ecclesial Method of Catechesis

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. – 2 Timothy 4: 1-2

Preparation

Here are some of the principal elements of this first step:

- Your relationship with the catechumens and candidates. (St. John Bosco said, “Get them to love you and they’ll follow you anywhere!”)
- Your arrangement of the class environment to be hospitable and attractive (St. Augustine warned not to let them be too cold or too hot because they will sleep or be distracted!)
- Your readiness for them when they arrive – knowing their names, not being preoccupied.
- A “sacred space” ready as a focal point for prayer and attention.
- And your sincere love of teaching them, your carefully prepared opening prayer.

The purpose of this step is to create the conditions for the deepening of God’s Word in your students hearts. This preparation should help them disengage from other preoccupations and remember how good it is to come to your RCIA meeting! (With a group you are just getting to know this could take several weeks.)

Proclamation

- Your announcement of the truth to be examined, learned and assimilated comes like that of a herald, boldly and clearly stated but not intended as a confrontation. It is really like rolling a very interesting object into the midst of a curious crowd.

-- For a group of adults or older teenagers, a proclamation about Mary might sound like this: *“Tonight our topic is Mary, the Mother of Jesus. From all eternity God intended to employ the help of a human being to accomplish the Incarnation, that woman was Mary of Nazareth. By her agreement with the*

divine plan and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit she became the Mother of God.”

-- For a younger group, it might be: *“Today you’re going to learn more about Mary, the Mother of Jesus. God always wanted to ask someone to help bring Jesus to us. He wanted a mother. He asked Mary who lived in Nazareth. She said yes to be God’s mother and then later He gave her to us to be our mother too.”* (This would be a proclamation for young children.)

- The purpose of this step is to clearly proclaim the truth to be taught. It does not take long at all, but following a well-crafted proclamation, everything else follows more clearly.
- It’s like saying, “This is what we are doing tonight.” When catechumens and candidates go home, they know what they learned! Therefore, the announcement must not be ambiguous or delivered as an apology.
- **This is the central step of the method.** All of the other steps come to relate to this one.

Explanation

- Your proclamation signals the opportunity to examine this “good news” which you have just presented to the catechumens and candidates.
- In addition to presenting catechesis in a straightforward manner, you can get creative to draw the catechumens and candidates out:
 - Do some apologetics.
 - Show your slides of a Holy Land trip.
 - Share your testimony.
 - Break into small groups to examine the ramifications of this truth.
 - Show and discuss various sacred art renderings of the Annunciation event and the Crucifixion with Mary there at the foot of the cross.
 - Study a new prayer to memorize or look up Scripture verses pertinent to this truth.
- This is the step in which participants’ questions and doubts need to be honestly addressed, privately but soon, or in the group setting.
- The important thing is to explain, so that even if the truth reaches to the heights of transcendence it is reasonable and wonderful. It does not insult intelligence, rather it informs and inspires.

Application

Now you can begin to address what this truth means for the catechumens and candidates.

- A catechumen or candidate might be led (by grace) to think:

“If Mary the Mother of God, and I see that she is, what does that mean about my long held impression that Catholics virtually worship her. Yes, I remember how the kings of the Old Testament related to their mothers. I wonder what Jesus wants me to do about His mother?”

- In helping them to apply this insight to their lives. . .

...you might write a series of “news stories” telling more about this woman, Mary of Nazareth and how she has affected the lives of so many people throughout the ages.

...or you might encourage them to go home and fix a May shrine in their room.

Or you might teach them how to pray the rosary so that they might do so every night for the son they’re so worried about.

- The result is that they might say, *“You’ve given me a lot to think about.”*
- This step intends to help the trust and conviction of the earlier steps bear fruit. It should also be focused to enlighten the catechumens and candidates experience, or intimation, of the truth of the lesson: for example, their love for Mary (or their resistance to her).

Celebration

- To conclude an RCIA session, you need to give the catechumens and candidates a way to respond to the grace which God was giving them while they investigated His truth.
- By praying the Litany of Loretto or the Memorare, processing to the parish Marian shrine, or simply asking Mary to help them come closer to her Son, a lesson on Mary ends by gathering up their heartfelt thanks and praise and teaching them another reason for prayer!

A. A Word (or two) on Methodology in General

- your knowledge of your students, your objectives for this class, and the content you will be presenting should determine the methodology,
- try to make your student text and teacher's manual aids to your lesson, rather than being tied to their lesson for you to do next – the more you plan the lesson the better you will teach it,
- if you are teaching this class once a week, make time to take notes and impressions right after teaching the class – that is when you'll have some ideas about what you would like to make before the next class, (and are likely to forget by next week!), -- then you can wait to finish the plan until just before the next class, knowing you will be better prepared – a week is a long time in most busy schedules.
- plan once a term to look at the lessons coming up and make decisions about whether the text has the best order of topics for you, decide what you want to do about feast days, see if there is an activity that would help get some lessons across but will need advance planning, etc.
- plan to teach the same class again next year, the first year teaching anything is always the worst year! – try the second year, that is when you'll know if this an apostolate God has for you and you'll give some students a better year!

B. Objectives Help, Make Yourself Write Them and Follow Them

- realistic goals, one for the “understanding” aim and one for the “change” aim of CT #20, will help you, and the students, notice that you are getting somewhere, (they don't need to know the objectives / goals, they will be able to tell that progress is being made) – a deadly factor in once a week classes is that they just seem to plod along, it is hard to see progress unless you plan progress,
- do you want students to get a better academic grasp in this lesson, are you intending some impetus for deeper conversion, is the goal to stir up apostolic zeal, do you want to have loving one another, do they need to practice showing reverence (genuflecting and using holy water), is your goal to show them how much you love them – these and other goals like them should not be granted, but they must be set and accomplished.

C. Have Stories Ready! Always be Looking for Stories and Collect Them

- everyone loves a good story, jot down the main points and keep them with your lesson planning materials,

-- stories of your life, not embellished, are very helpful because you reveal yourself to your students – you don't want to be just “that teacher” – prepare aspects of your love for God and the Church, witness to them regularly,

-- for teens and adults stories right from the news, the parish, the neighborhood give you a chance to shine a light of God's love on reality and encourage the same thing in them,

-- lives of saints and holy people are always useful, but make sure you portray them as real and believable – St. Teresa of Avila said there is nothing worse than a “sad” saint! Actually her meaning of the word would rule out saints,

-- anthologies and digests are good sources, practice the telling keeping it pithy and interesting.

D. Don't Read to your Students, Except Stories or Scripture

-- only for those two mediums will any student stay attentive to reading,
-- even though you come across a great quote, even something from the Catechism, don't read it to them, paraphrase it – unless they have the same source and can read along.