

# Holiness as a Way of Life

*Holiness is the crucial word that can be pronounced in presenting a new Directory for Catechesis. It is the herald of a way of life that catechists are also called to follow with constancy and fidelity.*

## **PREFACE, DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS**

Attendance at daily Mass was part of my routine as an elementary student at Christ the King Catholic school. In addition to rows of restless children, a smattering of parishioners came each day and followed us to communion. One of them was Mrs. Coughlin. Even though I was instructed to keep my head down as part of my post-communion prayer, I stole a peek as she made her way back to

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her pew. How she did so with eyes closed was a mystery to me. I was intrigued, most of all, by the sweet smile on her face. I wasn't sure what it was about, but I knew I wanted what she had.

This may have been my first experience of evangelization, one that fits so beautifully with the description given by Pope Francis: "It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 15). I certainly knew this through the way in which Mrs. Coughlin's holiness touched my heart. She embodied for me a love for Jesus that sparked my curiosity and tweaked my own desire to know him more deeply. Decades later, as I reflect on my experiences as a catechist and catechetical leader, I recognize the significance of such moments. No wonder that the new *Directory for Catechesis* (DC) places such emphasis on the way in which catechesis flows from the larger mission and ministry of evangelization. If we don't first "attract," then any efforts to open up the beliefs and practices of the faith fall flat. And what better form of attraction than that of holiness?

Placed within the Preface's closing paragraph, the holiness of the catechist is given particular emphasis. As heralds and witnesses of the faith, catechists have a profound ability to attract others to the Good News of Christ and the unending mercy of God. Lest we confuse holiness with perfection, however, we have only to look to the saints—those models of holiness—for some down-to-earth role models. While struggling with very human weakness, they sought God's goodness and responded in kind. One of the greatest of these is Thérèse of Lisieux, who described holiness as simply "doing God's will and being just what God wants us to be." Mrs. Coughlin, while never knowing the impact she had on a young child, was doing just this—being who God wanted her to be.

Unlike some of the other aspects of catechetical formation, there is no game plan for becoming holy, no course to take, book to read, or syllabus to follow. Instead we open ourselves to God and let grace

flow. Thérèse calls it a “disposition of the heart,” making us humble in the truest fashion. Rather than overlooking or over-emphasizing our weaknesses, we acknowledge who we are and place all trust in the infinite love of God. As you move through this booklet, take time to both reflect on the questions in each section and then consider ways to integrate the Directory’s insights about holiness into your ministry as a catechist.

## For Reflection

- *Who first attracted you to your faith? How might you be attracting others?*
- *How do you define holiness? What role does holiness play in your call to being a catechist?*

## For Integration

*Thérèse of Lisieux prayed each day with an icon of the Holy Face of Jesus. Mrs. Coughlin attended daily Mass. Such spiritual habits help to form the disposition of the heart that fosters holiness. If you have a regular spiritual practice, take time to reassess how you devote yourself to it. If you are in need of a practice, choose something that fits **your** life and experience and give yourself to it wholeheartedly.*

# The Call to Evangelize

*In their dignity as children of God, all believers are active participants in the catechetical initiative... and because of this are called to be missionary disciples.* **DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS, 4**

The disciples gathered together in the upper room—confused, frightened, and uncertain of what to do next. The air began to stir and then increased in intensity. As it roared around them, sparks began to fly and then explode into flame, each one coming to rest just above their heads. To their amazement, the fire didn't scorch hair or garments. Instead its warmth began to work its way inside of them. Revelation dawned. It was a new Pentecost.

We know the rest of this story, as told in the Acts of the Apostles. Stirred by wind and flame, the disciples emerged from the upper room and began to share the Good News with others.

The mission of the Church—the reason it exists—is to evangelize. Even so, the word itself can generate feelings of confusion, inadequacy, or even intimidation. Me, evangelize? While tongues of flame and indoor windstorms might not be part of your experi-

ence as a catechist, the call to evangelize remains vital. Thankfully, we each have a particular way of doing this. My early experience of being touched by the witness of Mrs. Coughlin bears this out. More often than not, it is what we do that carries the weight of evangelization. Words may follow, but the modeling of our faith remains primary.

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of rediscovering the gospel in new and soul-invigorating ways. “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world. Every form of authentic evangelization is always ‘new’” (EG, 11).

I always loved the phrase used by the evangelical organization Young Life: “It’s a sin to bore a kid with the gospel.” If we are going to avoid boring *anyone* with the gospel, we must heed the words of Pope Francis by staying open to its richness and seeking creative ways to bring it to life with those we catechize. Several years ago, I came across a book on leadership that used the image of water carriers in indigenous tribes as a metaphor for those who sustain the life and well-being of the community. It resonated strongly as something that could also apply to the role of the catechist. A vital aspect of this responsibility is ensuring that we don’t carry stagnant water to those we serve. Hildegard of Bingen—eleventh-century abbess and Doctor of the Church—used similar imagery in her description of “viriditas.” Applying her knowledge of gardening to the spiritual life, she spoke of the need to water our souls through regular prayer and, in so doing, open ourselves to the “greening power” of God. In such a way, we become—sometimes without our awareness—active participants in the work of catechesis and the call to missionary discipleship.

## For Reflection

- *How do you define evangelization? What excites or intimidates you about the word and concept?*
- *What are you doing to “recover the freshness” of the gospel in your daily life and practice?*

## For Integration

*Incorporate the daily readings into your morning or evening prayer practice. Make use of online or print resources that offer reflections to deepen your understanding of Scripture and apply it to your life. Practice **Lectio Divina** to make praying the words of the gospel and other passages from the Bible a part of your spiritual practice.*

# Beauty and Holiness

*Beauty is always and inseparably steeped with goodness and truth. Therefore, contemplating beauty elicits within us sentiments of joy, pleasure, tenderness, fullness, meaning, therefore opening us to the transcendent.* **DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS, 109**

My husband and I recently moved to a town on the Arkansas River. Having grown up in close proximity to the mountains of Colorado, I never thought much about the profound effect of living close to the water as well. These days I sit by the river as much as possible. In doing so, I am uplifted by the beauty of its currents and steady flow. It restores something deep and rich to my soul, filling me with the sentiments listed in the Directory—joy, pleasure, tenderness, meaning.

The word “beauty” is mentioned thirty-six times in the *Directory for Catechesis*. It is used to describe the disposition of sharing the Good News, the celebration of the liturgy and sacraments, the love shared in a family, and the primacy of grace in the process and practice of catechesis. Like a mighty river, the loving initiative of God

flows on. We need only respond by listening and trusting in the beauty and power of grace.

*Kerygma*—the first proclamation of the gospel—entails sharing the “beauty of the Gospel” as characterized by Jesus in his care for those who were poor, rejected, marginalized, and desperate for hope. Catechists carry out this task by following the example of Jesus, who used both beautiful words and beautiful actions in revealing the transformative love of God (DC, 175).

Beauty surrounds us if we take time to notice. It comes in majestic form but more often in experiences of the ordinary. Julian of Norwich—fourteenth-century anchoress and mystic—illustrates this as she reflects on the wonder of the hazelnut. In this small thing she notes how its perpetual beauty comes from the love of God who made, loved, and preserved it. Through this meditation, she recognizes its application to all of creation and to our essential unity with God. She calls this being “oned” with God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

This is the proclamation that catechists share through beautiful words and actions. Giving ourselves over to the beauty in and around us arouses an innate recognition of divine love which flows on in a river of unending grace. What could be more beautiful than that?



## For Reflection

- *Where do you find beauty in your life?*
- *What sentiments does beauty engender in you?*

## For Integration

*Dedicate a time and space each day for a “beauty break.” Listen to a favorite piece of music. Gaze upon a scene of nature, an icon, or work of art. Spend time contemplating something as small as a hazelnut and consider how it reflects the love of God. Be mindful of the beautiful words and actions you proclaim in your ministry as a catechist.*