

Parish Catechists and Catholic School Teachers as Witnesses to Christ  
Presented by Jim Gontis

Questions for reflection are not to be answered aloud, but are simply for your own personal reflection.

- I. Catechists and Teachers as saints and witnesses.
  - A. What is a saint?
  - B. Pope Paul VI – On Evangelization in the Modern World - EN 41 – *Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.*
  - C. God is Truth and Love, Not Either/Or. We are also to be about both. Strive to live out and to teach the truth in charity.
  - D. Keep in mind what it is, ultimately, that we want for our students – That they know, love, and serve God in this world and that they are happy with Him forever in Paradise, cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1721.
- II. Reception of the sacraments and our fruitfulness as teachers.
  - A. First, we must realize that God is everywhere present.
  - B. Ask God the Holy Spirit to guide you.
  - C. Don't be afraid to ask the Mother of God, your Guardian Angel, and your patron saint(s) for their help and protection.
  - D. Living a sacramental life – we cannot give what we don't have.
    1. Mass as the “source and summit” of the Christian life.
    2. Sacrament of Penance
    3. Practice liturgical and non-liturgical prayer.
      - Questions for personal reflection:  
Does God hold first place in my life? Does it show in my frequenting of Mass and the Sacrament of Penance?
  - E. We have an obligation to form our hearts and minds according to the Church and not selectively.
    1. It is important that Catholics not be “cafeteria Catholics.”
    2. Our teaching is not our own. It comes from Jesus Christ and His Church.
      - a. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* – “The law of prayer is the law of belief.”

b. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is an invaluable gift in thinking with the heart and mind of the Church!

- Question for personal reflection: Do I believe all the doctrinal teachings of the Church? Do I seek to know God better through prayer and spiritual reading or am I satisfied with where I am in the spiritual life (St. Thomas Aquinas taught that if we are not progressing in our spiritual lives, we are regressing).

3. Striving for holiness

- a. Strive to be faithful in your state of life.
- b. Prayer should precede all we do, it should also accompany all we do, and it should follow all we do.

- Questions for reflection: Am I fulfilling the duties of my state of life? Do I pray at least every morning, before every meal, every night, and at least occasionally at other times of the day?

F. Be familiar with and exercise the four Cardinal virtues

1. Prudence – Doing the right thing at the right time
2. Justice – Giving each person his / her due
3. Temperance – Self-control
4. Fortitude – Courage even and especially in the midst of difficulties.

- Do I strive to put into practice the four cardinal virtues at home? At work? On which am I strongest? Which do I most need to work on? Let's make a resolution to do so.

III. Catechists/Teachers as witnesses to students

- A. Do not pit head and heart, truth and love, against each other. The intellect and the will are both powers of the soul given us by the same God, and God cannot contradict Himself. The intellect is designed by God to know the truth. The will is designed by God to love.

1. Knowing the truth about God helps us to conduct our lives well. That is, knowing the truth about God is a great help in loving Him and our neighbor. It is hard to love God if we don't know Him, just as we can't love another human being on a personal level if we don't know him/her.
  2. Generally speaking, children like to learn the truths of the Faith when they are presented by people who are well –formed, who have genuine apostolic zeal, and who the students sense care about and love them. Patience is crucial when teaching!
  3. So what are some of the things you should be teaching regularly?
- IV. Witnesses to Each Other in the Religious Education Program or Catholic School
- A. Be positive
  - B. Be courteous, kind, and respectful to everyone – Pastors, Principals, DREs, Fellow Teachers, Fellow Catechists, Students, Parents, etc.
- V. You have a tremendous opportunity, privilege, and responsibility as Catholic school teachers. You have a unique opportunity to help to form young minds in the Truth and Love Who is Jesus Christ. It is spiritually profitable to consecrate all that we are, have, and wish to be to Jesus through Mary!

Let us very often ask the all-good, all-loving, all-merciful, and all-powerful God for the grace to teach His children well, for the grace of humility, for the grace to bear much good fruit, and to glorify Him in all things. Trust in Him! His grace is never lacking! Jesus, I trust in You!

A Few encouraging Scripture quotations for Parish Catechists and Catholic School Teachers!

*I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me.* - Philippians 4:13

*...the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, And those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever. –*

- Daniel 12: 3

*Attend to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in both tasks for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.*

- 1 Timothy 4:1

