



Dear Catechists,

I would like to thank you. Thank you for your yes to God's call of being transmitters of the faith. Your role as teachers of the Church is one that is underappreciated and misunderstood. Thank you for all the time, effort, and sacrifice you place in teaching others about the faith which you yourselves love. God will reward you with many blessings for this beautiful gift you have given him.

What is a Catechist? Perhaps it is fitting to start with what a catechist is not. A catechist is not just an ordinary teacher. Your subjects and teaching topics are not concerned with literature, math, or history primarily. Your subject is far more important, the most important. It is the subject of the Catholic faith and all that this implies. In recent times, the sense of responsibility and mission that is connected with being a catechist has seemingly vanished. For many it is simply a "side thing," something you do to "give back" to God. This is true and good, but being a catechist should be and is something so much more profound than this. Believe it or not, you have now become the primary source of faith education for most of the children and teenagers that come to your classes. **The only time many of these children hear about God and Catholicism happens when it is coming from your mouths, during your lessons.** The priest also relies heavily on you to transmit the teachings of the Church since most of his time is spent in administering the Sacraments and taking care of the parish in various ways. The priest needs you. When you think and pray about these circumstances, you realize that they have big implications. You are needed by the students, the parents, the parishioners, and the priest! More than anything, we need good catechists. This, I believe, implies self-formation, teaching the truth, and setting hearts aflame.

## Form Yourself

The Church has developed a well-known Latin adage that states *Nemo potest dare quod non habet*, that is: you cannot give what you do not have. In order to form others you must form yourselves first. This becomes reality in a variety of different ways. Take advantage of the programs offered to you by your parish or diocese, which are geared towards the instruction of catechists. A large part of self-formation comes through prayer. All fruitful apostolic work begins with a serious prayer life. In prayer, we draw water from the living fountain of Christ's heart, which in turn sustains us in all of our apostolic endeavors.

## Teach the Truth

One of the fastest growing diseases among Catholics today is ignorance of what the Church actually teaches and believes. It seems that from generation to generation the faith, morals and traditions so characteristic of our faith are not being handed down from parents to children or are handed down incorrectly. The truth is needed more than ever in the society and culture that we are a part of. You must teach the truth about the faith! Do not "water down" the teachings and practices of the Church and do not try to conform what we believe in order to appease the culture of today. Sometimes we underestimate the capacity of the students we teach in their ability to accept and understand what the Church teaches. The priest especially relies on you to teach the truth faithfully. How you do this is also an important topic of discussion. I challenge you to think of new and creative ways to hand on the Gospel message. Make it interesting, make it exciting, and make it beautiful!

## Set Hearts Aflame

You as catechists have a beautiful mission. You can inspire a whole generation of Catholics if you believe in what you are doing! **Your goal should be to set the hearts of your students on fire with love for Jesus Christ. Make them want to follow, love and learn more about Him each day of their lives. Yes, this is your mission.** It is a big one and perhaps not an easy one. But the Lord is with you and with Him, all things are possible. Remember once again that many people are relying on you to do your best in accomplishing the task that **God has entrusted to you.** To end this letter, I think a beautiful quote from St. Catherine of Siena will suffice: "If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world ablaze."