

Catechesis: Lectionary-Based Catechesis

Introduction

Lectionary-based catechesis is a **conversation** between the world of the Sunday Scriptures and the world of the user(s). It is intended to facilitate conversion and immerse the learners in the values of the Scripture. When it is done well, it helps those who participate to come to a better understanding of how the Scriptures continue to call us to **conversion** in our contemporary world.

This segment is meant to help you reflect on the importance of lectionary-based catechesis. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the *first question*. Then read the article “Lectionary-Based Catechesis” and jot down your responses to the *reflection questions*.

First Question

How has reflection on the Scriptures helped you grow in faith?

Lectionary-Based Catechesis

In recent decades, lectionary-based catechesis has emerged as one form of catechesis offered for adults, children, and intergenerational groups in many parishes. The momentum for this form of catechesis seems to have received its energy from the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council and the development of catechetical structures for the Rite of Christian Initiation.

The Lectionary

The current lectionary is the result of decisions made by the bishops at the Second Vatican Council, in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. The Fathers of the Council wished to provide Catholics with a much richer selection of Scripture readings than what they were accustomed to hearing. They said:

Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy... . Hence in order to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that sweet and living love for sacred Scripture to which the venerable tradition of Eastern and Western rites gives testimony. (#24)... That the intimate connection between rite and words may be more apparent in the liturgy: (1) in sacred celebrations a more ample, more varied, and more suitable reading from sacred Scripture should be restored. (#35)... The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative part of the sacred Scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years. (#51)

As a result of these directives, an entirely new lectionary for the Roman Catholic Church was drawn up and promulgated on May 25, 1969. In the Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* (April 3, 1969), Pope Paul VI referred to the revision of the lectionary and indicated that its purpose was “to accentuate the dynamism of the mystery of salvation, shown in the words of divine revelation.... According to the hopes of the Second Vatican Council, sacred Scripture will then be a perpetual source of spiritual life, the chief instrument for handing down Christian doctrine, and the center of all theological study.”

In the Roman lectionary, the Sunday cycle of readings is spread out over three years, rather than a single year as was previously the case. Each Sunday, there is a selection from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season, when the Acts of the Apostles is used), a psalm sung after the first reading, a second reading from one of the New Testament books, and the Gospel text. The first year of the cycle (A) features the Gospel of Matthew, the second (B) Mark, and the third (C) Luke. Texts from the Gospel according to John are interspersed at various times in all three years. The new lectionary also provides a volume for weekday readings (on a two-year cycle) as well as texts for various feasts, seasons, and other ritual celebrations.

Lectionary-based catechesis serves an important function in the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Indeed all the Sacraments are key moments in life when faith can deepen, and awareness of God's saving work can crystallize. Lectionary-based catechesis helps individuals and communities enter into these sacramental events wholeheartedly, and receive from them an abundance of God's grace.

Method of Lectionary-Based Catechesis

Over a period of years what has come to be called "Lectionary-based catechesis" evolved as a *specific method* in which the starting point is the Sunday Reading(s). It may focus on one or all of the readings. The usual method is that the initial proclamation of the Word is heard during the Liturgy of the Word. At some later time, which could be immediately after dismissal for catechumens or during the week for other groups, the Word is reflected upon again; usually in a prayerful setting and participants articulate what word or phrase was meaningful for them in the readings and homily. The facilitator or

catechist then gives input on the reading(s) which they have prepared for by reading some commentaries. He or she may situate the reading by talking about what comes before and after, whether it is part of a larger story, a discourse, a miracle, a parable, or call attention to whom it is addressed. After these comments the reading is read again and the group engages in dialogue about what the reading is saying about Christian life today and what it is teaching about God, the Church and or the life of discipleship. The catechesis concludes with response to the question “What is this reading calling (me or the Church) to do this week to live it out?” Often times with catechumens, adult study groups, or children’s religious education settings, lectionary-based catechesis is followed by more doctrinal catechesis on a given theme or topic.

You will find short lectionary-based outlines at www.aliveinchrist.com along with a correlation of the Sunday readings to the *Alive In Christ* texts.

Reflection Questions

- How do you think lectionary-based catechesis helps people deepen their faith?
- How can you incorporate reflection on the Sunday readings into your sessions?