

The Teacher as Catechist: Spirituality and the Teacher

Introduction

Spirituality is not really mysterious. Basically, it is a way of being in a relationship with God, ourselves, and other human beings. This segment is meant to help you reflect on the spirituality of a Catholic school religion teacher and how religion teachers, as catechists, are to be in relationship with their students. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting or journaling on the *first question*. Watch the video *Spirituality of the Catechist*. Then read the article “Spiritual Openness” and jot down your responses to the *reflection questions*.

First Question

- What does it mean to be a spiritual person?

Video

- Watch the video *Spirituality of the Catechist*.
- In what ways do you experience yourself acting with the mind of Christ?
- What would you add or change about your response to the first question after watching the video?

Article: Spiritual Openness

Catechists must have a deep spirituality, i.e. they must live in the Spirit, who will help them to renew themselves continually in their specific identity.

The need for a spirituality proper to catechists springs from their vocation and mission. It includes, therefore, a new and special motivation, a call to sanctity. Pope John Paul II's saying:

"The true missionary is the saint," can be applied without hesitation to the catechist. Like every member of the faithful, catechists are "called to holiness and to mission," i.e. to live out their own vocation "with the fervour of the saints." (Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples Guide for Catechists, Vatican City, 1993, par. 6.)

Being a catechist is about more than being a religion teacher. The *Guide for Catechists* emphasizes that being a catechist is a call or vocation. You will spend a good amount of time preparing lessons and activities, but it is also important to spend time being in relationship with God and with the young people with whom you interact. The *Guide* goes on to describe several kinds of openness that ought to be part of a catechist's spirituality.

Openness to God's Word

Since the most fundamental work of catechists is to communicate God's Word; the fundamental spiritual attitude should be one of openness to God's Word as it is expressed in Scripture and the doctrines of the Church. Whether it is in hearing the Word preached from the pulpit, studying the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, or seeing it in the lives of the saints, it is always a way we meet the living God. It is important for the growth of a catechist's spirituality to pray and reflect on the Word in Scripture and doctrine, and through that reflection to grow in relationship with God: Father, Son and Holy

Spirit, and the Church.

Openness to the Church

Catechists are living members of the Church. What does that mean today? When I am a living member of a group, I feel a sense of belonging and responsibility for it. In a unique way, catechists are the concrete, flesh and blood people who young people come to know as Church. For some young people, especially those who come from non-practicing or alienated family systems, catechists are the only witnesses they know. In most parishes, catechists are commissioned before the assembly. This commissioning demonstrates that the role of catechist is not an individual's action but the Church's action. This sense of being a witness on behalf of the Church demonstrates itself in a true love for the Church and her teachings.

Openness to the World

While separation of State and Church is a principle of American life, being members of the Church does not mean we are to separate ourselves from the world. In fact we are called to be leaven for the world. It is important for the Church and its catechists to be open to the needs of the world and to work toward fulfilling them, especially the poor and disenfranchised. Another characteristic of this openness is the ability to see and help others see how faith helps us live as witnesses to others about the message of Jesus.

As the *Guide for Catechists* states: Catechists, therefore, will be open and attentive to the needs of the world, knowing that they are called to work in and for the world, without however belonging completely to

it (cf. Jn 17:14-21). This means that they must be thoroughly involved in the life of the society about them, without pulling back from fear of difficulties or withdrawing through love of tranquility. But they must keep a supernatural outlook on life and trust in the efficacy of God's Word, which does not return to Him without "succeeding in what it was sent to do" (Is 55:11), par. 7.

Reflection Questions

- In what ways do you nourish your spirituality?
- What information in the article gave you new insight?