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REFLECTIONS

MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP

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Evangelization and Catechesis

A poorly dressed girl about nine and her two younger siblings approached me after Mass. I had just announced that the parish would begin faith formation classes for children the next week and invited parents to sign up their children.

I had seen these children in church before, always by themselves. With tears in her eyes, the oldest girl said, "Father, who will teach us about God?" None of her relatives attended church. Their mother, with whom they lived, was a good woman, but professed no active religious beliefs.

The children wanted more—they wanted to learn about Jesus and follow his way, so each Sunday, they came by themselves. In time, the parish catechists made sure the children received religious instruction.

A similar scenario occurs in the faith life of many children and youth. Their inner spirit searches for God, but no one at home supports them. Not all children can walk to church, as these children did.

Evangelization involves the whole process of proclaiming God's Word by good example and in systematic ways. Catechesis, a form of the ministry of the Word, is an aspect of the evangelization process.

Catechesis is directed toward the formation of a person in Christ. Viewed in a **less systematic way**, it may include speaking of God's love to a friend, family prayer, or teaching a child the Our Father. Such activities have a catechetical aspect. Seen in a **systematic way**, catechesis includes those activities that call forth a response to God's Word in an intentional, deliberate, and structured way.



Systematic catechesis helps the one catechized to hear, understand, interiorize, and respond to God’s word in acts of service and celebration. It happens in religion classes in a Catholic school, parish school of religion classes, and adult faith formations sessions. Systematic catechesis can be found on the Internet, on special digital programs, or in bible study groups.

While learning information (Who is God? What is sin?) is an important aspect of catechesis, catechesis is directed primarily to the formation of children, youth, or adults in the faith. **Information** helps those catechized to learn Jesus’ message. **Formation** helps the one catechized to interiorize Jesus message and strive to live as he did.

Contributing to the Church’s catechetical ministry is a vital aspect of a church leader’s, parent’s, or catechist’s responsibilities. Print and digital products balance the information and formation aspects of catechesis. In so doing, they focus on the Church’s evangelizing efforts by teaching the essential aspect of our faith, rooted in Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and linking catechesis with other aspects of evangelization. Church leaders, especially, need to appreciate this bigger picture of how catechesis connects with evangelization and flows through all church ministries.

QUESTION

If asked by a parent how to employ solid catechetical principles (hear, understand, interiorize, and respond) while focusing on the call of recent popes to evangelize, how would you answer?