

September 21, 2008

This Sunday I ask you to consider and pray for a very important ministry in the Church. The bishops of the United States designate the third Sunday of September as Catechetical Sunday to recognize the calling and important service rendered by those who serve as catechists in our parish religious education programs, Catholic schools, youth ministry programs, RCIA process, sacramental preparation sessions, and adult faith formation opportunities.

Many of our parish communities will recognize the ministry and efforts of these dedicated individuals by a formal commissioning, a special blessing and prayers at our Sunday Eucharist. I ask that you give your wholehearted support to all those we recognize as our catechetical leaders and seriously consider assisting in this most important effort.

This Sunday's readings provide an excellent paradigm of the faith formation process. The First Reading from Isaiah identifies our innermost need and longing for God in our lives. "Seek the Lord while He may be found" expresses our deep desire for communion with the Lord, for a relationship with a God whose "thoughts are not your thoughts" and His ways are not our ways. Unfortunately, the subtle influence of secularism, materialism, and individualism in our culture often prevent people from being in touch with their innermost longing.

Psalm 145 gives us insight into the qualities of this God we seek. "The Lord is good, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness...compassionate toward all His works." The psalmist also reminds us of our longing and need to express praise to the Almighty, again reflecting our total dependence on the Lord.

St. Paul in his Letter to the Philippians explains the purpose of his ministry as a preacher of the Good News. Every catechist involved in faith formation would do well to reflect on verse 25: “I know with confidence that I shall remain and continue in the service of all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.” The work of all those who communicate and pass on the faith, catechists and teachers alike, is rooted in the very act of loving service to those they instruct. We need only look to St. Paul as an example of a dedicated servant of God’s Word who is passionate and unashamed about sharing it with others.

St. Paul admonishes our students, catechumens, candidates, and others considering the Good News being proclaimed and taught: “Conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ.” In other words, effective catechesis invites, promotes, and sustains a loving relationship with the Lord Jesus and a life formed by His message.

The entire Christian community has a responsibility for the faith formation of its members. Some have very privileged and responsible roles as pastors, teachers, catechists, and administrators of faith formation programs. They must constantly prepare themselves to provide the very best catechesis and religious formation by their own ongoing theological and catechetical formation. Our own faith formation is never finished.

Very importantly, every parishioner impacts the faith of others by the way we live and witness to our own faith. Whether we faithfully participate in Mass every Sunday and whether we pray at home every day makes a difference in the lives of others, especially our young. This Catechetical Sunday is a celebration and recognition of our common responsibility to grow in the life and love of the Lord and share our faith with others.

To all of you who faithfully strive to live as followers and disciples of Christ, “thank you.” Let us continue to serve each other and our God as we live and walk by faith.