

CATECHESIS FOR TODAY

*Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!* I'm delighted we have this Catechists Formation Day today, a Saturday, a day customarily spent under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Catechesis, as the *Catechism* says, a systematic education in Christian doctrine that enables listeners to enter the fullness of Christian life, comes from the Gk. word *kata-ekein*, to echo, to re-sound, to play back. That surely was the relationship between Jesus and His parents in Nazareth as Mary and Joseph initiated Him into the social and religious *milieu* of His day. But it must also have been a reality for Mary Herself, *full of grace*, She Who not only conceived and bore the Word of God in her flesh, but Who put that Word into practice in her daily life. No wonder Jesus in the Gospel, thinking of His Mother, said: *Still happier, those who hear the Word of God and keep it!*

Now I hope you are enjoying being here today. I thank you for being here. I thank our Formation for Mission Team for all that they do. But I especially thank each one of you for undertaking the ministry of Catechist for children, adults, baptism, confirmation or whatever. It is a huge responsibility, especially in today's secular consumer-culture. It's a huge challenge, seeking to elicit commitment from people living busy lives that often overlook the essentials. Today we have been reflecting on the role of Scripture in catechesis, but let me mention three brief and more general points about catechesis today.

First of all, you cannot give what you haven't got, even with the best program in the world. Sound knowledge is crucial, but in the end what counts is your faith. You have to be a person in love with Jesus Christ. You have to be holy to bring others to Him. You have to be a person of prayer, able to teach others to pray. You have to be like Mary, one who practices what they preach. So, in this way, we need to offer not just catechesis but an *evangelising* catechesis capturing the imagination and touching the heart of a listener, as much as their head.

But secondly, we live in a culture that ignores the First Commandment, to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength*, and this has grave consequences for our society, for ethics and for human wellbeing. Many people deny the existence of God. They are what the National Census calls *nones*, people of no religion, and in some parts of our Diocese, nones make up 40%. Indeed, surveys show that nearly 50% of our Mass-going population is not really sure God exists. So, our evangelising catechesis needs to appreciate this. It needs to study the *preambula fidei*, the openings of faith. More, it needs to help people hear the call of Jesus and enter a life-changing friendship with Him.

And last, an evangelising catechesis needs to tackle Scientism, the silly belief that science alone gives you truth, and that religion and other forms of knowledge are just private opinion. Now don't get me wrong: I love living in 21C with its amazing technology: imagine being without modern dentistry! But science isn't enough. We want to be happy. We want to love, and to be loved. We want immortality, to live forever. After all, most of the important things in life are invisible. This is why science needs to be in dialogue with other forms of human knowing, especially ethics and faith. So, our evangelising catechesis shouldn't be afraid to tackle Scientism or to deal with science and religion.

*Put the sickle in; the harvest is ripe* said Prophet Isaiah. *Come and tread; the winepress is full; the vats are overflowing.* To be a catechist today is a wonderful ministry. Never give up hope, however dispiriting it might sometimes seem. Trust God and in His love. Already the Spirit is at work in the heart of every child, woman and man in our Diocese, wooing them towards Christ and His Church. Already we can sense a new Springtime of faith with fresh growth. Already, in the Diocese people are coming forward, wanting change, prepared to give of themselves whatever is needed. So, in this Mass, let us call on Mary. Let's ask Her to obtain for us a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Let's ask Her to guide our work as catechists. Let's ask her to lead everyone to Christ Her Son, and to that true genuine lasting human happiness and fulfilment for which they long.