

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY THE PERFECT CATECHIST

I'm happy to offer Mass today not only for our Cathedral parishioners but for you our catechists. I thank Sr. Hyacinthe and the Formation for Mission Team for their excellent support of catechesis in the Diocese. I thank too Claire Simpson and the Pre-Discipleship Team for their work preparing the way for catechesis. But I especially wish to thank each one of you catechists for undertaking this crucial ministry to children and adults for baptism, confirmation and whatever. In today's post-modern culture, to give catechesis is a huge challenge. It's as much about image, style and beauty as about doctrines, ideas and words. It's difficult to enthuse people when they are so busy with work and other commitments that often limit their attention span. But even so, today I echo St. Paul in that 1stR: *having heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and the love you show towards all the saints, I never fail to remember you in my prayers and to thank God for you.*

The word *catechesis* comes from Gk. *katēchein*, *kata* = back, *ēchein* = to echo, hence to echo back, to re-sound, to play back. Catechesis is a systematic presentation of Church teaching that's meant to be played back. The *Catechism* says why. It is part of the effort *to make disciples, to help people believe that Jesus is the Son of God* (4). Catechesis, it says, is built on *the initial proclamation of the Gospel, on missionary preaching that arouses faith* (6). At its heart is a *Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth*. To catechise is to reveal the Person of Jesus, to put people in communion with Jesus (426) and to enable Jesus to speak to them through the lips of the catechist (427). All of this has important implications for us today. For it reminds us that all the catechesis we give has to be *evangelising* catechesis. It must lead people to the Person of Jesus Christ. It must help people encounter Him. It must foster within them a personal-passionate friendship with Him. Above all, it must assist them find Him in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

Now today is a Saturday, the day of the week we honour the Blessed Virgin. For Mary is the Model Catechist: if you want to know how to be a catechist, just look to her. Think of the magnificent job she did with St. Joseph, initiating Jesus into the religious and social milieu of the day. Yet initially she was diffident. When asked by the Angel Gabriel to undertake her unique role as the Mother of God, she was troubled. Yet trusting in God, she went on to say Yes. She believed the message; she pondered it in her heart, and she put it into practice in her life. If as a catechist you ever doubt your ministry or fear you're not getting through to people, ask Mary, the Mother of Catechists, to obtain the grace with her to say Yes. For she shews us what to do: how to bring people to Jesus. It's a good question to ask yourself in every lesson: How does this lesson bring people closer to Jesus?

*May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, give you a spirit of wisdom and a perception of what is revealed, to bring you to full knowledge of Him.* That is our prayer. You cannot give what you haven't got. To talk about holiness, you must be holy yourself. To teach people to pray, you must be a person of prayer yourself. To bring people to Jesus, you must love Jesus yourself. In all of this, Mary is our Model. She is our Mother. So in this Mass, let's ask her help. Let's ask her to help allay our diffidence. Let's ask her for the grace always to say Yes. Let's ask her to help us be the friend of Jesus to bring many more people to Him.