

Irish Conference on the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Talk #1: "Open the Door to Faith "

Congowes Wood College

Saturday, July 5, 2014

10:45 AM to 11:30 AM

I. Introduction

- a. My sisters and brothers in the Lord, the Holy Spirit has gathered us here this morning to celebrate the gift of our Catholic faith
 - i. To spend this time together in prayer & to celebrate what we believe
 - ii. To also grow in appreciation of the great gift of the Catechism of the Catholic Church that you have been studying for over three years
 1. Part of our mission together is to explore ways by which we can share this great resource with other believers and people of good will
- b. I am deeply grateful for the privilege to share this time with you:
 - i. Thanks to all who organized this day
 1. Special thanks to Mairin and the members of the Steering Committee
 - ii. Special thanks to Archbishop Charles Brown
 1. For his leadership here in Ireland
 2. For his personal friendship
- c. Since it is your study of the Catechism is what has brought you together in the first place, I will offer some opening remarks about the Catechism which will not come as any surprise to you
 - i. Larger Task is to open the question of the modern context for Catholic Faith which is one of the prime reasons why the Catechism exists
 1. By "context", I mean more specifically, what in the world around us is preventing so many people, especially young adults, from embracing the gift of Catholic faith and utilizing the great gift of the Catechism to come to understand and accept the truths of our faith
 - a. If the catechism is a great tool to (1) bring people to faith or (2) strengthen those who already believe, how can we effectively share this gift with others?
 2. To examine this "context", we will spend time in reflection about the divine gift of faith itself
 - a. We will go to the very heart of our lives and ministry

2. Second, we will look at the larger world and ask:
 - a. How can we effectively invite people to encounter the Lord Jesus and come to faith, or deeper faith, in Him?
 - i. We will return to this topic, which is the bulk of what we will explore together
- II. Catechism of the Catholic Church:
- a. Since the very beginning of the Church, many attempts have been made to create a compendium of that which we believe as revealed truths in Christ
 - i. Two Early Examples:
 1. *Didache*: Late first or early 2nd century
 - a. Other title: "Teaching of the 12 Apostles"
 - b. Earliest catechism that was divided into three parts:
 - i. Christian Ethics
 - ii. Rituals, especially Baptism and Eucharist
 - iii. Church organization (Hierarchy)
 2. *23 Catechetical Lectures of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem* for catechumens prior to and following their baptism
 - a. First 18: Catechetical Lectures to prepare for reception of Baptism
 - b. Final Five: Mystagogical Lectures to assist in the ongoing life of faith
 - i. POINT: There has always been a need to explain in a coherent manner that which we believe as Catholic Christians
 - ii. In the Counter-Reformation period, the importance of the catechism rose dramatically:
 1. There was tremendous confusion about the tenets of the Catholic faith in the wake of Protestant teachings
 - a. A shocking fact is that 80 % of all Europe had at one time embraced some form of Protestantism
 2. The Council of Trent authorized the creation of the "Roman Catechism"
 - a. Two key purposes:
 - i. For use by priests in the instruction of the people
 1. Not intended for direct use by the faithful
 2. Implied that the priests did not have a true understanding of the faith
 - ii. To eliminate all doubt about what the authentic teachings of the Church are

1. Remained in effect until the current Catechism was promulgated in 1992 by Saint John Paul II
- iii. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* began its formation from the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985
1. After a period of unparalleled consultation and input from bishops from around the world which changed the original draft significantly
 2. Saint John Paul approved the text on June 25, 1992 and promulgated it on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1992)
 - a. In 1997 a slightly modified text for the Catechism was approved and remains in effect
- iv. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* has a fourfold structure that highlights the four main pillars of Christian Discipleship
1. The Profession of Faith
 2. The Celebration of the Christian Mystery
 3. Life in Christ
 4. Christian Prayer
- v. Why is it so important?
1. It has a fourfold purpose:
 - a. To provide a “Summary of authentic Catholic catechesis”
 - i. To present the essential and fundamental content of our faith in a complete, authentic and summary way
 - b. To serve as a point of reference for national catechisms
 - c. To explain Catholic doctrine in an objective, declarative and systematic way
 - d. To serve as a resource for all those who catechize (more than priests)
 2. Its ultimate purpose is twofold
 - a. To deepen the faith of those who use it
 - i. Knowledge leads to appropriation
 - b. To assist people of good will to come to faith in Christ
 3. Lonergan’s exposition of conversion is helpful here:
 - a. Conversion is a three fold experience (usually in this order)
 - i. Intellectual Conversion

1. You are no longer able to run from the truth when you confront it
 - a. Saint Augustine is an example of someone who came to intellectual conversion first
 - ii. Moral Conversion
 1. Withdrawal from self preoccupation to concern for the other
 - a. Sin is rooted in such self-preoccupation
 - iii. Religious Conversion
 1. Recognition of the presence of God and response in prayer and worship
- b. POINT: Catechism is designed to be an aid in all three forms of Conversion

III. The Catechism and our Contemporary Society:

- a. So I must ask a troubling question:
 - i. With so great a gift as the Catechism so readily available, why have we not seen a greater resurgence of Catholic faith?
 1. In many ways, the situation is worse now than 22 years ago
 - a. Mass attendance is lower now than when the Catechism was promulgated
 - b. Less young people are identifying themselves as Catholics
 - c. In the US, 20% of Hispanic young people profess no organized faith at all!
 - ii. It seems to me that we must take a step back and come to understand more profoundly the “context” of our modern life, especially as it impacts on our young adults
 1. Purpose: to unleash the great power of the Catechism
 - a. For if our desire is to deepen our own personal faith and lead others to faith (=evangelization), then we must take stock of what is at work
 - i. A complete answer is not possible in the limited time we have
 1. Goal: Raise points for continuing reflection
 - b. Let us begin by reviewing what the divine gift of faith itself

b. What is Faith?

i. Catechism teaches us that Faith is both a divine gift and a human response

1. It is a divine gift that one cannot earn or achieve on your own

a. It was told to St Peter by the Lord (Mt. 16:17): his profession of faith was not revealed by “flesh and blood” but “from my Father who is in heaven”

i. Holy Spirit is given to move our hearts to accept the revelation of God

b. It is a gift (*theological virtue*) given and received in response to hearing the offer of salvation preached to us in an effective manner through the grace of Christ

i. Preaching in many forms

1. Words
2. Example
3. Culture and environment

ii. As I reflect upon my own life, I do not know how I came to faith but I know what I enjoyed:

1. Catholic Family
2. Loving Neighborhood
3. Vibrant Parish
4. Catholic School

a. I am forever grateful to those who helped me to receive so great a gift!

2. Faith is also a gift that cannot be imposed but demands a free response:

a. We must trust and submit to what we hear and respond with a submission of our lives is our free act to do or nor to do

i. Submit how?

1. Can begin in many ways

- a. Our mind
- b. Our hearts
- c. Our will must submit freely to God or else it is not a gift

b. Submit to what?

i. It is the presence/revelation of God which the Church proposes for our belief and it is

1. Professed in the creed

2. Celebrated in the Sacraments
 3. Lived by a moral life that fulfills the New Commandment
 4. Responded to in worship and prayer
- c. Better way to understand this: To answer the question: "Who do you say that I am?"
- i. Establishment of an enduring, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus through the Community of the Church
- c. What seems to be difficult in our modern world is achieving the disposition needed (1) to recognize the gift of faith and (2) respond to it
- i. This disposition is what is being challenged at times in our culture of indifference
 1. We will speak more about this modern phenomenon of "indifference" later in the presentation
 - ii. What is this disposition?
 1. Revelation 3:20: *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him and he with me"*
 2. It is two sentences with four phrases, each essential to understand the disposition that any person needs in order to accept or deepen the gift of faith and help others to accept it
 - a. *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock"*
 - i. First Insight: Comes from this image
 1. What is the DISTANCE between Christ and the person on the other side of the door?
 - a. Measured in mere inches
 - b. Point: Revelation of the NEARNESS of God
 2. Father Robert Barron relates the Myth of Prometheus
 - a. For the Greeks, man needed to reach up to God
 - b. Christian Faith invites us to consider a God who comes down to us
 - i. Christ became a man like us in all things but sin

3. For many in our society, it is precisely God's connection and nearness that seems to be difficult for many to recognize
 - a. It is easy to accept the presence of God in my personal pursuit of being "spiritual"
 - b. What is difficult is to see the nearness of God present through the Sacred Scripture, Sacraments, the Eucharist and the Community
 - c. What we are living through is a crisis of the credibility of any community to be perceived as necessary for a person's spiritual life

ii. Second Insight: Nature of the Door

1. To what does the Door refer?
 - a. Answer: depends upon the person
 - b. Can be many things: (Lonergan)
 - i. Heart
 - ii. Mind
 - iii. Will
2. CHALLENGE: If someone is willing to open the door to Christ, we must be attuned to what he/she is willing to open
 - a. Just as the catechism has four pillars...we must be willing to take the time to discern what each person is ready to do
 - i. We must reach out one person at a time.

b. *"If anyone hears my voice"*

i. The Voice of God

1. STORY of the little boy in Church
 - a. I have been called many things:
 - b. Some I can even repeat here
 - i. Your holiness

- ii. Reasons include sin, betrayal and bitterness
- 2. Holiness= Pursuit to embrace trust in God
 - a. Trust that we once had as children
 - i. Jesus: "Be like the children"
- 3. We can faith in many things...none are totally trustworthy
 - a. Faith in God is unlike faith in anyone or anything else he is faithful, loving and true, his word and promises will never fail
 - i. No one else can give such an assurance
- 4. Modern Challenge: How do we help people to open the door to the Lord?
 - a. Prerequisite: A person needs to sense the loving presence of the one who knocks
 - b. It is an effective experience of love that forms us since we are children that can make the love of God credible
 - i. Why are parents the chief catechists of their children?
 - ii. KEY: They make the love of God real through the love they share with their children
 - iii. Also the love of friends, spouses, neighbors and even enemies
 - iv. Experiencing such love allows our belief that speaks of God as a Trinity of love and the Incarnation of love in Jesus Christ to be believable
- 5. Great challenge: Many people, especially young people, do not believe themselves to be loveable or worth much at all!

- a. How will they open the door of their hearts and minds if they do not trust the loving presence of those around them?
- d. *"I will enter his house and dine with him and he with me"*
 - i. First point: The Lord enters our broken lives:
 - 1. *GREAT EXCHANGE*: He enters to give to us by adoption what He enjoyed by nature
 - a. Kenosis
 - ii. Second point: He eats with us
 - 1. This is why the Eucharist is at the heart of our life and Church
 - a. Challenge for many young people who see the value in being "spiritual" but indifference in being "religious"
 - i. SPIRITUAL = ME
 - ii. RELIGIOUS = WE
- iii. You may say: I have already opened the door of my heart to Christ
 - 1. There is a HAUNTING QUESTION:
 - a. How wide is the door of your heart open to Him right here and now?
 - i. For much can occur to narrow the opening
 - 1. Our sins
 - 2. Our hurt and betrayal
 - 3. Disappointments (bitterness)
 - b. The opening is not done once but every day in countless ways
 - i. The disposition of faith is a lifelong process
 - 1. The goal is to open the door ever wider
 - ii. To realize the words of Saint John the Baptist
 - 1. "I must decrease so He can increase"
 - c. Faith is a precious gift that
 - i. Can diminish in us
 - ii. Can even be disfigured
 - iii. Can even be rejected

- d. Thus, before we discuss the work of evangelization and missionary discipleship, we must commit to deepen the gift of faith in our own lives
 - i. It is the prerequisite for all ministry in all its forms
 - 1. To open the door of the heart, mind and soul to the indwelling of Christ who come in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the life of the community of believers
 - 2. Three essential elements
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Penance
 - c. Works of Charity
 - i. Love as the call of mercy given by Pope Francis
 - 1. To concretize the love of God up close and personal
- e. For with our faith renewed and the doors of our lives opening every wider, then we will be ready to share faith with the waiting world
 - i. THEN the work of ministry and evangelization can begin in earnest
 - ii. Then the power of the Catechism will be unshackled for all to benefit

IV. How can we help others to open wide the door of their lives to Christ?

- a. In other words:
 - i. Evangelization: at its most basic is helping to introduce others to Christ or deepen their existing faith in Christ
 - 1. The new evangelization is being spoken about because the context in which we find ourselves is both new and challenging
- b. In a time when the credibility of the community itself is being questioned
 - i. And if our desire is to help others to recognize and accept the great gift of faith
 - 1. Then it is time for us to not simply catechize the faith but **WITNESS TO THE FAITH**

V. Power of Witnessing to Christ:

- a. STORY of Synod intervention
 - i. 12 Step program: Witness to your sobriety and struggles
 - 1. Why can't I witness and give testimony to my Catholic faith?
 - a. POINT: Precisely what we are called to do in ministry and discipleship.
 - ii. Our Task We must witness to BOTH the TRUTH and LOVE
- b. Witness: To the Truth who is Jesus Christ

- i. What is truth? Pontius Pilate's question to Jesus
 - 1. It is the most provocative question in all of SS:
 - a. Christ's gives no verbal response but he does give an answer:
 - i. Earlier in his ministry: "I am the way, the truth and the life"
 - ii. Reason why Christ had nothing to say is because he was the answer!
 - 1. The answer was not something but someone!
 - ii. We must witness to the truths of our Faith and the Truth of our Faith
 - 1. *Before Vatican II*: Revelation was mainly propositional
 - a. Apologetics was teaching people the answers of faith
 - i. Goal: Conversion of the Mind
 - 2. *Dei Verbum*: shift in definition of revelation as "Christ event"
 - a. Shift: challenges us to encounter the Lord in a real and existential way
 - 3. Two conclusions:
 - a. To understand the Truth takes more than the mind (truths)
 - i. Transformative encounter with the person of Jesus Christ in the community of the Church
 - 1. Copernican Revolution of the Spirit
 - b. The truths of the faith will not make sense apart from the Truth of the Faith
 - i. We all need both to know about Christ and to know Christ
- b. Witness: To the presence of Love who is God Himself
 - i. What is Love?
 - 1. Story of my mother and singing:
 - a. I was a bit spoiled when I was young
 - i. I know, it is hard to believe!
 - b. Mother would sing and before leaving, say
 - i. "Io ti voglio bene"= "I will your good"
 - ii. "Love is effectively willing the good of the other for the sake of the other"

- c. Before the *Cross*, we recognize it to be greatest act of love the world will ever know
 - i. Precisely because it was endured for our eternal and true good
 - 1. Also: love gives birth to true community, based on effectively willing the good of one another
 - a. Christian Love as a countersign/ contradiction to the love of the world
- d. Such a witness to love is the “Hidden key” to bring the offer of faith alive in others, especially young adults
 - i. It makes present the Triune God who is perfect love
 - 1. Allows each of us to enter into an unbreakable bond of grace, through the indwelling of the same Holy Spirit
 - ii. It re-establishes the credibility of the community
 - 1. “Way” of the primitive church was based on such love
 - a. Story of Ancient Rome
 - i. The earliest Christians marched to their deaths and sang
 - 1. The Romans asked: What did they have?
 - 2. Better question: Who did they have?
 - b. The lyrics of a famous hymn remain true: “They will know we are Christians by our love”.
 - iii. People’s lack of trust and lack of connection must be answered not simply in theory and lesson but in a real, lived manner
 - 1. Preeminent Importance of the Life of each Parish
 - a. STORY: Growing up in Bensonhurst
 - i. Custom: Where are you from?
 - 1. Answer: Parish name
 - ii. Our whole life revolved around the Parish
 - 1. Coming Home to smell the various tomato sauces cooking
 - iii. My only fight: which was a draw
 - 1. In six blocks, my mother was waiting for me on the front steps, looking for an explanation!
 - iv. We can bemoan the fact that our parishes are not quite loving communities.
 - 1. Yet, we cannot forget that we are charged to create a community within our own ministry as well.....

2. "Demand of Love": our ministry must be a place where a person can experience the love of Christ, based on his/her true good
 - a. More specifically, the requirements of any program cannot ever be a substitute for active, personal involvement in the lives of our people as fellow members of the community of faith
 - b. Engagement with their messy, broken and mix-up lives is quintessentially what makes us Catholic
 - i. We can come to discover the common mission to love as Christ does
 - ii. There is no substitute for entering the lives (loving) our students, one person at a time
3. "Burden of Love": How far can you go to assist in this messiness?
 - a. Our willingness to sacrifice
 - b. Our openness to change
 - c. Our desire to be stretched
 - d. To get our hands dirty As the Lord did!

VI. CONCLUSION:

- a. Story about Mother Teresa begging for bread accompanied by a little boy
 - i. "Thank you for that gift. Now what about the bread for the little boy?"
 1. That merchant encountered a powerful witness to the truth and love of Christ
 - a. If he allowed himself the ability to reflect on what happened, he would be ready to dive into the catechism and what it teaches.
- b. Let us go forth with hope that you and I can be such witnesses to our faith in Christ the Lord