

THE WORK OF CATECHISTS:

PLANT THE SEEDS IN THE FIELD OF THE LORD AT ALL TIMES

Prayer: 2 Timothy 4, 1-2

In his letter to the Romans, St Paul pronounces these important words which highlight to a high degree the relevance of the work of catechism: "How can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? ... Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ". (Romans 10, 14-15. 17)

According to this understanding, there is no growth in the knowledge of God without the help of others, because we are all instruments God uses to reach out to our fellows. In the same way, there cannot be salvation if people do not dedicate their lives to help others to come to know Jesus and to believe in him.

It is here that the task of catechist is made not only important, but also indispensable for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. When a catechist meditates these words of St Paul, we all feel that God invites us to rethink our ministry, to renew our passion for the Lord at the service of our brothers and sisters, and to rededicate ourselves for the call we have received to be the teachers of the word.

This ministry is tremendously important, because not only do we continue what Jesus, the supreme teacher, and the apostles have done since the foundation of the Church, but we also contribute through our teaching, in our own way, to the salvation of our brothers and sisters.

In this talk, my main goal is to stir up in us the fire of the love of God for their salvation of our brothers and sisters and. For that reason, I will refer to the image of a farm in order to highlight, on the one hand, the importance of the human and spiritual qualities a catechist ought to have in order to succeed in the ministry and, on the other hand, the importance of relying on the Lord who makes the word grow in the hearts of those who receive it. In three points, I will examine the context in which we minister, the condition of success of the ministry of catechist, and the qualities of a good catechist.

1. THE CONTEXT OF GOD'S FIELD TODAY:

The mustard seed Mt 13, 31-32

To begin with, I would like to refer to the parable of the mustard seed in order to let you understand the context in which we operate as catechists and what the Lord Jesus expects from us as catechists.

As a matter of fact, we all have the experience of the grain of mustard we buy in our stores. It is really tiny and not remarkable at all in terms of its size. The farmers say, and the Gospel as well, that when its seed is planted, it gives rise to a big tree on which even the birds come to make their nests.

By giving this parable, Jesus wants to remind us that the kingdom of heaven starts from the smallest beginning, but in the end many nations will be gathered within it. It is also a fact of history that the greatest things start always with the smallest beginnings. Many inventions we have on the market and which have transformed the world have been started by people behind closed doors and through intense reflection and repeated trials.

We as teachers are those who contribute to the growth of the kingdom of God by planting the seeds of the word of the Lord in the hearts of the children and those who come to religious education.

We have always to remember that an **idea** which may well change history and people begins with one person. As human experience has taught us, from the **witness** of one individual, the world can be changed for the best. **The one man or woman on fire for Christ is the person who lights that fire in other's hearts.** That is why your fire for Jesus, your passion for the Lord, your commitment to work for Jesus by fulfilling the work of evangelization and the ministry of catechism is of great importance.

I know that sometimes it is very difficult, especially when you worked so hard over the years and you realize that the young for whom you gave so much do not go to mass anymore or have changed the religion, it is easy to be discouraged. **Remember always that this is not your work, but the work of the Lord.** What you have to do in your human abilities, in terms of bringing the word to others, do it. The remaining, leave to God who makes everything grow according to his plan.

As you can see with the parable of the seed, Jesus is inviting us to courage and hope in our ministry as Catechists. We should never be discouraged for any reason. Even if our ministry seems to be very difficult, because of our personal commitment as mothers and fathers of families and, sometimes because of the children we have to teach, remember always that in spite of all that, from that smallest beginning, the kingdom of heaven can grow. With God, what seems to be just a modest beginning can shift from the invisibility of the kingdom to its full grandeur and glory.

Let us assume that it is so, but is there anything we can do at our level in order to improve the way we bring the word to others? Or shall we leave everything to God's care because he is the only one who makes the seed push? Let us attempt an answer with the parable of the sower.

2. THE CONDITIONS OF SUCCES OF THE WORD:

Parable of the Sower Mt 13, 18-23

If you have some experience of a farm, you know that the harvest depends on many factors, like the climate, the weather and, most importantly, on the quality of the soil. A soil poorly prepared has no chance of producing more fruit beyond what it can give. The same is true with a soil that is not fertile enough. **It is only when the soil is well cultivated, prepared and fertile that the farmer stands a chance of having a good harvest.**

The same is true with the word of God. If it does not find a prepared human heart that is ready to accept it, there is no chance of success of producing fruit in a person. **The problem, however, is that it is not only a question of those who hear the word, but also of those who bring that word to them.** It is here that our task as catechist becomes very important. Because according to the word of St Paul, they cannot **call** upon the name of the Lord if they do not **believe** in him. But, how can they believe in him if they have not **heard** about him? And how can they hear without someone to **preach**? And how can they preach unless they are **sent as ministers?** (**Romans 10, 14-15**).

As you can see, the task of the word of the Lord is **double**: it has to do with the listeners who have their part to take in the progress they have to make in the knowledge of the Lord. At the same time, **there is a task that is reserved to the teachers** who have to give the best of themselves to the growth of the word of the Lord.

That is why it is important to ask yourselves at the beginning of this liturgical year the question of knowing **how determined** you are in carrying out this difficult task with the whole of your heart? **How determined** are you this year to be a good teacher, capable of preparing the hearts of those entrusted to you to become a good soil for the growth of the word of God in them? **How ready** are you as catechists to prepare the children and their families to be fertile ground for the word of God? **How do you intend to plant** the seeds that will be brought to fruition?

When we look globally at the parable of the sower we realize that it teaches us that the **word of God is like seeds** that a sower plants in a field. As the growth of the seeds depends on the quality of the soil, so the success of the word of God depends on the disposition of the hearts of those who listen to it.

This parable contains a warning to the hearers. It means that **there are different ways of accepting the word of God, and the fruit which it produces depends on the hearts of those who accept it.** In that perspective, the fate of any spoken word depends on the hearers and their disposition of hearts which is symbolized in the parable by the path, the rocky ground, the thorns and the rich soil. There are four types of people corresponding to the quality of soil on which the seeds fall in.

Whatever might be the importance of the warning this parable has for the hearers, **I am mostly interested in its impact on those who preach the word.** Because, not only is the parable meant to say something to the listening crowds, but also to the inner circle

of the disciples **whose main task was to preach the word of Jesus** and to bring salvation to their brothers and sisters in the world.

As a matter of fact, the context of the parable refers to the discouragement of the disciples confronted with little success in their work of preaching. **For those discouraged preachers of the word, the lesson of the parable is the picture of the seed that brought forth abundant fruit.** Some seed may fall by the wayside and be snatched away by the birds; some seed may fall on the shallow ground and never come to maturity; some seed may fall among the thorns and be choked to death; but **in spite of all that, the harvest does come.**

No farmer expects every single seed that is sown to germinate and bring forth fruit. Farmers know quite well that some will be **blown away by the wind**, and some will fall in places where it **cannot grow**; but **that does not stop them from sowing.** Nor does it make them give up hope for the harvest. **They sow in the confidence that, even if some seed is wasted, nonetheless the harvest will certainly come.**

So, this is **a parable of encouragement** to those who sow the seed of the word. When we sow the seed of the word, we do not know how the result will be and what effect the seed will have. But, **we trust God** and his plan on those entrusted to us; **we do our part** according to our human strength and organization, and **we put the remaining into Jesus' hands.**

Moreover, **when we sow the seed of the word, we must not look for quick results.** There is never any haste in nature's growth. It takes a long, long time before an acorn becomes an oak; and it may take a long, long time before the seed germinates in the heart of an individual. But often **a word dropped into someone's heart in childhood lies dormant until some day it awakens and its memory brings resistance to some great temptation or even preserves that person's soul from death.**

Let me remind you that we live in an age which looks for quick results; but in the sowing of the seed we must sow in **patience** and in **hope**, and sometimes must **leave the harvest to the years.**

3. ON BEING A GOOD CATECHIST

If the harvest of the word does not depend only on the listeners, then **the question of the quality of the teacher and the way of teaching becomes important.** Remember that your **example of life and prayer** plays a big role in helping the people entrusted to your care. I can assure that I have become a priest thanks to one of my former teachers of the second grade. I can say with my human judgment that that man is a saint even though the Church has not canonized him. His life of prayer was such that he deeply touched my life to the point that I could not do anything else than to become a priest.

The same is true for you. **Be aware of the role of raw model you play for the children.** Your life of prayer is so important that, without knowing it, you influence children as I have been influenced by my former teacher of the second grade. A good prayer life is always a chance for the children to see concretely that their teachers are the **persons who belong to God** and **teach from the heart.** Your life of faith through

your **participation in the holy Mass, the receptions of the sacraments, and the reading of the word in the bible** you teach are of great importance.

- a) **Spiritual qualities:** - You need to build your own life on spiritual qualities like prayer life and the participation in the holy Mass, without which it will be shaken.
- b) **Pedagogic Qualities:** - **prepare your teaching** even when it is about the simple things you really know very well. – Do **not take your class for granted**, rather strive to **know more by reading** and informing yourselves – Take the time to **plan** what you have to teach. – **Master your lesson** by reading it yourself ahead of time so that it becomes easy for you when you give it. **Be creative and imaginative** with regard to the ways you have to attract the children and lead them to Jesus.
- c) **Human qualities** are important to each one of the catechists. Without them, it will be difficult to cope with the situation of children who are sometimes **noisy, difficult in listening**, uninterested, etc. – Another important quality is **punctuality**. Please be on time and do not let yourselves to be waited for by the children. It is part of your respect for the children and their children you are teaching.

4. CONCLUSION

Being a teacher is a wonderful task, but also a difficult one. The two parables we have used for this retreat tell something about our ministry and the way we have to fulfill it. First of all, the work we do is important because it is all about bringing the Lord to others. Our commitment, passion and love of the Lord can change children and families. Second, we have to bear in mind the truth that whatever might be the difficulties we encounter in the teaching of the word, in the end the word will bear fruit. In fact, God does not sow in vain, even if we are imperfect teachers and instruments. If some seeds fall on a road surface or a rocky ground, others fall on a good soil. This is the hope we bear for the success of the work of God. Moreover, whatever might be our failures in what we do, there is always a chance that even a small portion of our work may succeed. We have to be courageous, patient, and keep working hard in hoping for a harvest at the appropriate time.



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