

The Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults as a Resource for Creating Encounters with Christ

Encounters with Christ

As Paul Philibert said earlier, a synod is a time of rediscovery, a time of renewal, a time to reconnect with God and with who we are in his eyes. This theme has marked the papacy of Pope Francis. In ‘The Joy of the Gospel’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*), Pope Francis issued each one of us with an invitation:

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.”¹

Of course this idea of encounter with Jesus is nothing new. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI used a very similar thought in his Encyclical Letter ‘God is Love’ (*Deus Caritas Est*):

“Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”²

In 1979, Pope John Paul II, now Saint John Paul, in ‘Catechesis in Our Time’ (*Catechesi Tradendae*) said...

“At the heart of catechesis we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, ‘the only Son from the Father... full of grace and truth’ (Jn 1:14), who suffered and died for us and who now, after rising, is living with us forever.”³

Why is this encounter with Christ important? Saint John Paul gives us the answer in the same paragraph from ‘Catechesis in Our Time’:

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.”⁴

Our relationship with Christ is so important because He leads us to God the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is the daily encounter with Christ draws us into closer communion with the Trinity.

Adult Faith development is about creating that place of encounter with Christ. It is about making the time and opening our hearts to re-discover who God is, who we are as God’s beloved, what God has done for us and who God calls us to be. This is why catechesis is so important.

Catechesis comes from the Greek word ‘catechein’, originally meaning ‘to echo’. In the New Testament it was used to mean ‘to hear’, ‘to learn’, or ‘to instruct’. St. Paul, in particular, uses this phrase in his First Letter to the Corinthians: “I handed on to you that which was handed on to me.”⁵

¹ Pope Francis, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, paragraph 3.

² Pope Benedict XVI, 2005, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html, paragraph 1.

³ Saint John Paul, 1979, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae_en.html, paragraph 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ 1 Cor 15:3.

In catechesis, “what we echo or hand on is more than just a message – we echo a Person. We are not only learning a series of truths – we are not only learning about Christ. We want to ‘gain Christ and be found in him’ (Philippians 3:8-9).”⁶

So how does the Catechism help foster encounters with Christ?

Just as Paul Philibert used the image of a symphony earlier to describe how each Christian, with their own unique talents and gifts, come together and contribute to the ‘symphony of the one body of Christ’ i.e. the Christian community, Saint John Paul used the image of a symphony to speak about the faith.⁷

Just as a symphony is made up of different notes and musical phrases which come together as a beautiful harmony, so the “different truths about God and Jesus Christ, about the sacraments and liturgy, about how we can act in order to respect our own and others’ dignity and how we grow in faith through prayer,”⁸ come together as a harmony in the deposit of faith.

The first movement in the symphony of faith is **The Creed: The Faith Professed**. This is our story. This is the story of who God is, the revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who we are as God’s beloved and what God has done for us. It is the Good News of the Gospel.

The second movement in the symphony of faith is **The Sacraments: The Faith Celebrated**. This is where we come together as a Christian community to celebrate what God has done for us in the first movement.

The first two movements in the symphony of faith are pure gift – pure grace. It is only in the third movement that our response to God’s grace is highlighted in **Our Moral Life in Christ: The Faith Lived**. The temptation is to jump straight to morality some times, but it is only when we see and experience God’s love and what it means to be beloved of God and who we are called to be as children of God that Christian morality really makes sense. This movement encourages us in how we live the new life in Christ we received in baptism, therefore, we look at it from the viewpoint of our moral life **in** Christ.

The last movement, but by no means least, is Prayer: The Faith Prayed. Christian prayer is a covenant. A covenant is an agreement by which two persons give themselves to each other. For example, marriage is a covenant where the husband and wife give themselves to the other. God gives himself to us, to enable us to give ourselves to him. Prayer deepens this relationship of love.

Prayerfully reflecting on these movements creates moments of encounter with Christ. It allows us to get to know him better so that we may become more like him and more open to his love. He in turn will teach us more about God the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Gifts and Talents

The *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* is a new resource from the Irish Episcopal Conference. Designed to complement the Catechism of the Catholic Church, it is adapted for an Irish audience and written in accessible, easy-to-understand language. Each chapter begins with a ‘story or lesson of faith’, featuring many notable figures from Ireland, such as Edmund Rice, Catherine McAuley and Nano Nagle. Those chosen are people whose lives or actions illustrate a particular Church teaching.

⁶ Maryvale Institute, *Echoes, Leader’s Guide*, Session 1.

⁷ Cf. Saint John Paul II, 1992, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_19921011_fidei-depositum_en.html

⁸ De Cointet, P., Willey, P., Morgan, B. (2008): *The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Craft of Catechesis*, Ignatius Press, p. 18.

In this workshop we are looking at how these lessons of faith inspire us to see our own gifts and talents and how we can use our gifts and talents to help others. When Paul Philibert spoke with Diocesan staff during the week, he highlighted the importance of charisms, gifts which are given God for the good of the community. Charisms are of many different kinds: preaching, leadership, gifts for celebration, for administration, for animating a group, plus special talents that enrich the work of a community. Today Paul emphasised that although we come from different roles, backgrounds, experience and talents, “we meet as peers: all of us are baptised into Christ, anointed by the Spirit, and called to the work of building up the Church, the Christian community.”

St. Paul stresses the importance of each and every Christian to the Church: “Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ.”⁹ In the following activity we are going to use the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* to examine how people used their charisms to build up the Church, the Body of Christ:

1. Nano Nagle: Mother of Irish Catholic Education (cf. Chapter 9: Receive the Holy Spirit, pp. 111-113)
2. Edel Quinn: A Thoroughly Modern Missionary (cf. Chapter 11: The Four Marks of the Church, pp. 137-140)
3. A Baptismal Witness to Justice for Minorities: John Boyce O’Reilly (cf. Chapter 15: Baptism: Becoming a Christian, pp. 201-203)
4. The Story of L’Arche (cf. Chapter 17: The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Christian Life, pp. 233-236)
5. A Married Man: God’s Servant above all (cf. Chapter 21: The Sacrament of Marriage, pp. 309-310)

What gifts/talents can we identify in each story?

What can we learn from how they lived their faith?

What will the synod mean to me?

Of course, the saints are no different to you or I. Each person has been given some ‘definite service’ by God. As Blessed John Henry Newman said: God “has committed to me some work to which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.” God never gives us a mission without giving us the gifts to complete such a mission. This is why Bishop Brendan encouraged us to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit and to call upon him often. The Holy Spirit will help us to identify our particular gifts and talents and our particular service for which they were given to us.

The Diocesan Synod offers us an invitation to renewed personal encounter with Christ each day. It is a call to discover/rediscover our God-given gifts and talents and to take up the challenge that is ours as disciples of Christ. We are not left alone in this challenge. Neither do we have to do everything ourselves. As Bishop Ken Untener said reflecting on the life of Oscar Romero:

“We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities... We are workers, not master builders.”¹⁰

In other words, we do our little bit in sowing the seed, in sharing our gifts and talents with others, and we leave the growth to God.

⁹ 1 Cor 12:12-13.

¹⁰ Bishop Ken Untener, http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/archbishop_romero_prayer.cfm