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Third International Congress on Catechesis



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By Thaddeus Jones

Greeting the participants gathered at the Vatican for the Third International Congress on Catechesis, organized by the Dicastery for Evangelization, Pope Francis expressed his joy in meeting with them and paid tribute to their international diversity.

The Pope stressed the very important role catechists play in the Church, calling them "a sign of the Church's responsibility to so many people: children, young people and adults who wish to make a journey of faith." He explained that he instituted the ministry of Catechist knowing the great role it can play in the Christian community.

Pope Francis pointed out that he greeted everyone at this audience as catechists, including the bishops, priests and consecrated members among them, as all are catechists. "The Lord calls us all to make His Gospel resound in the heart of every person."

The Pope also shared that he truly enjoys his weekly General Audience on Wednesday at the Vatican, since it is a "privileged time" to reflect together on the Word of God in light of the Church's tradition and find ways to witness to the Gospel in our daily lives.

Never tire of being catechists

The Pope encouraged catechists to never get tired of their ministry, to avoid a 'school lecture' type catechesis, and to strive to offer a "living experience of the faith that each of us wishes to pass on to the new generations."

At this time, offering catechesis is challenging work, he admitted, since it involves finding the best ways to communicate the faith to different age groups and walks of life.

The key, he noted, is the interpersonal encounter that "opens the heart" to hear the Gospel and accept the invitation to live and grow in Christian life. The new Directory for Catechesis distributed recently will offer helpful guidance, the Pope mentioned, especially in how to renew catechesis in dioceses and parishes.

Catechesis: Encountering and welcoming the Lord

The Pope underscored the purpose of catechesis, describing it as a "privileged stage of evangelization," where one encounters Jesus Christ and allows Him to grow in our lives.

The theme of this third International Congress is precisely, "The Catechist, witness of the new life in Christ," focusing on the third part of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Pope recalled. He noted, in particular, what the Catechism has to say about truly being witnesses to this new life.

"When we believe in Jesus Christ, partake of His mysteries, and keep His commandments, the Savior Himself comes to love, in us, His Father and His brethren, our Father and our brethren. His person becomes, through the Spirit, the living and interior rule of our activity. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2074)"

This is why Jesus gave us the commandment "*that you love one another as I have loved you*", the Pope said, since true love comes from God and Jesus revealed by the mystery of His presence among us, His preaching, miracles, and especially His death and resurrection.

"Christ's love remains as the true and only commandment of the new life, which the Christian, with the help of the Holy Spirit, makes his or her own day by day in a journey that never stops."

Returning to source of love

In conclusion, the Pope reminded the catechists that they are "called to make visible and tangible the person of Jesus Christ, who loves each one of you," guiding our lives and helping us discern our moral actions.

“Never turn away from this source of love, for it is the condition for being happy and full of joy always and in spite of everything. This is the new life that sprang up in us on the day of Baptism and that we have the responsibility to share with everyone so that it can grow in each person and bear fruit.”

The Pope spoke briefly off-the-cuff about catechists who were instrumental in his own life and faith journey. In particular, he paid tribute to an elderly Sr. Dolores, who taught him when he was young, and whom he remembers fondly today for her dedication, care, and impression left on him, helping him in his faith life. He encouraged the catechists to never overlook the good work and impression they can have in their own ministry on others, as Sr. Dolores did with him.

Pope Francis offered them his blessing, entrusting the catechists to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the catechist martyrs.

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