

[Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; Ps. 54; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37]

Who is called to be the “first and best” teachers of the Catholic Faith to our children? Who is given this responsibility, this challenge and this mission?

It’s not the priests and the nuns. It’s not the catechists whom we bless today. It’s not even the Pope himself. It’s mom and dad. It’s grandma and grandpa. It’s the parents and guardians of our youngest parishioners.

Your pastor, your parish staff, and your parish catechists are the SECONDARY teachers of your children in the ways of faith. We ADD TO what you should be providing at home. We work together in a partnership of teaching. You are the meat, we are the gravy. You are the cake, we are the frosting.

Bishop Robert Baron, an Auxiliary Bishop from Los Angeles, California, Shares these thoughts about today’s Catechetical Sunday. He says that a good catechist follows the Greek Philosopher Aristotle’s three-fold guide for teaching authentically: logos, pathos and ethos. These are not the names of the Three Musketeers, but translate in English as the word, the passion and the lifestyle.

First, the Word. Do we know our Catholic Faith well enough to accept it, to explain it, and to teach it to others? Each of our homes should have a Catholic edition of the Bible, a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and a list of Catholic websites to find the answers to the questions about our Faith that confounds us from time to time. Everyone should still be learning!

Second, the Passion. Are we passionate about our Catholic Faith? Do we take the Catholic knowledge we have and bravely share it with others? The most effective teachers of the Catholic Faith are those who are on fire with it. Our Faith is dynamic. The word dynamic has the same root word for dynamite. One Catholic author says about the unfortunate reality of most Catholics is that they hermetically seal their faith, put it in a can, and lock a lid on it. It’s time to blow the lid off of our Catholic Faith and let it explode in our homes, our parish and our society!

Third, the Lifestyle. Do our thoughts and attitudes, our words and actions reflect our Catholic Faith? Are we believers of integrity and trust? Are

we truly “Disciples of Jesus: Witnesses to the Gospel,” which is the theme for this year’s Catechetical Sunday? Young people can detect insincerity in us within seconds of talking with or listening to us.

Bishop Baron then spoke of the four questions that most young people, especially teens and young adults, fault us grown-ups for either their leaving the Catholic Church, their not investing in the Catholic Church, or their not trusting us adults, because the answers we give them are not sufficient to convince them of their truth. Here are the four questions:

How do we know that God exists?

If God exists, why is there evil in the world?

Why is the Catholic Church the only “true church” in the world?

Why do the teachings of the Catholic Church about sexuality hurt people?

Today we are treated to one of the most memorable moments of the teachings of Jesus. Today Jesus gives His disciples the correct answer to their quarrelsome discussion of who is the greatest. So what does He choose as His audiovisual prop, His mind-boggling and heartwarming example to make His point? He chooses... a child! A child. To teach His prestige-and-popularity-seeking pupils that they have their pecking order all wrong. They wanted to start at the top with the best and the greatest. But Jesus reverses the order and starts at the bottom with the worst and the least, namely a child.

We have to remember back then that a child was not seen as the clean, cute and cuddly kind. A child in the time of Jesus was the lowest of powerful humans. Powerless. Two thousand years ago, the infant death rate sometimes reached thirty percent of live births, and sixty percent of children were dead by the age of sixteen. Children were not even counted in the local census until they were twenty years old, and only then they counted only the males.

Yet, it is Jesus, the only begotten Child and Son of God, Who identifies Himself with the lowest and the least. And He says, “Whoever receives one such child as this in My name, receives Me.”

When we were children in my family, sometimes we would question why we had to do our chores, or when mom or dad said something we didn’t agree

with. When this happened, my mom would sit me down, put her hand on my shoulder and say, “My beloved son, when we say something to you that you don’t agree with or ask you to do your chores, it’s because we want you to accept more responsibilities and grow in doing your share of duties for the house. You may even learn a new skill which will help you when you are older. And you will form a deeper bond of love with your brother and your sisters.” [Long Pause...]

Nah, my mom never said that!! Most of the time she would shorthand her answer to this piece of advice: BECAUSE I SAID SO!!!

How many of YOUR parents responded the same way? How many of you responded to YOUR kids the same way? And when you did, did you phone your parents to apologize to them and them that they were right?

We need to listen more to our young people. To hear their questions not as a challenge to our authority, but as an invitation to seek together the truthful answers to life’s questions and to faith’s doubts. We do this as a witness to others in our community who may be struggling with their own identity, with their own faith, with their own search for meaning in life.

When a fight breaks out in a school yard, a bar, a sports arena or a prison yard, more often than not, a crowd gathers not to break it up but to watch. Some even join in. We let our lower passions get the best of us and rule over us. Our human instincts of jealousy and ambition, envy and covetousness challenge our designs on peace, respect, and taking care of the needs of others. These are the misguided passions St. James speaks about in today’s Second Reading.

If we dare to accept the challenge of Jesus to passionately proclaim and teach our Catholic Faith, we are put on a sure collision course with contemporary culture.

It won’t be easy. People will ridicule us, badger us, and even shame us into not doing what Jesus wants us to do. Look at the figure in today’s First Reading. The Suffering Servant will do just that, suffer. But even the evil ones who will do the inflicting of pain and suffering let words of truth slip out between their grinding teeth. “The just one is the son of God.” “God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes.” “We have proof of his gentleness and

patience.” “God will take care of him.” So it will be with us! If we just trust.

May Jesus, the Word made flesh, Mary, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom, St. Martin de Porres, and St. John Baptiste de La Salle, patron of teachers, pray for us, bless our catechists and young people, open our hearts, and bless and keep us safe as we accompany one another in our journey of faith, as we grow in our Faith, and as we share it with others. As Disciples of Jesus, and as Witnesses to the Gospel.” AMEN!