

## The Spiritual Life of the Catechist

Taken from the Guide for Catechists, by the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples, 1993

“God has set up in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . .”

- 1 Cor 12:28

### Summary

“At the origin of the Catechist’s vocation, apart from the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, there is a specific call from the Holy Spirit, ‘special charisms recognized by the church’ and made explicit by the bishop’s mandate. It is important for the catechist candidate to recognize the supernatural and ecclesial significance of this call, so as to be able to respond like the Son of God, “Here I come” (Heb 10:7) or, like the prophet, “Here I am, send me” (Is 6:8; Guide for Catechists, 2)

Catechists must have a sincere spirituality. They must live in the spirit, who will help them to renew themselves continually in their specific identity. (6) Like every member of the faithful, catechists are “called to holiness and to mission,” to live out their vocation ‘with the fervor of the saints.’” (6)

“Catechist spirituality is also conditioned by their apostolic vocation, and therefore should bear the marks of openness to God’s Word, to the Church and to the world; authenticity of life; missionary zeal; and devotion to Mary.” (6)

**A. Openness to the Word.** The office of catechist is that of communicating God’s Word, and so the fundamental spiritual attitude of the catechist should be one of openness to this Word. Openness to the Word means openness to God, to the Church and to the world. (7)

1. **Openness to God** requires an interior attitude which shares in the love of the Father, who wishes that all should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4); which seeks communion with Christ, so as to share his own “mind” (Phil 2:5) and experience . . . which allows oneself to be molded by the Spirit and transformed into a courageous witness and an enlightened preacher of the Word. (7)
2. **Openness to the Church** expresses itself by filial love, dedication to its service and a willingness to suffer for its cause. “In particular, it is expressed in the attachment and obedience to the Roman Pontiff and to the bishop, the father and guide of the particular church. The catechist’s service is never an individual or isolated act, but is always deeply ecclesial. The ecclesial sense that is proper to the catechist’s spirituality expresses itself in sincere love of the Church, in imitation of Christ, who “loved the Church and sacrificed Himself for her.” It is an active and total love which becomes a sharing in the Church’s mission of salvation to the point even of giving one’s life for it if necessary.” (7)
3. **Missionary openness to the world** “requires that catechists be open and attentive to the needs of the world, knowing that they are called to work in and for the world, without however belonging completely to it.” (cf. Jn 17:14-21)(7) “This means that they must be thoroughly involved in the life of the society about them, without pulling back from fear of difficulties or withdrawing through love of tranquility.”(7) They must keep a supernatural outlook on life and trust in the efficacy of God’s word, which does not return to Him without “succeeding in what it was sent to do.” (Is 55:11) (7) “Openness to the world is a characteristic of the catechist’s spirituality in virtue of the apostolic love Jesus the Good Shepherd, who came “to gather in unity the scattered children of God.” (Jn 11:52) Catechists must be filled with this love, bringing it to their brothers and sisters as they preach to them that God loves and offers his salvation to all.” (7)

**B. Coherence and Authenticity of life.** “Before they preach the word, catechists must make it their own and live by it. Before doing the catechesis one must first of all be a catechist; the truth of their lives confirms their message.” (8) “Authenticity of life means a life of prayer, experience of God and fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit. It implies a certain intensity and an internal and external orderliness; adapted to the various personal and family situations of each . . . the more intense and real one’s spiritual life is, the more convincing and efficacious will one’s witness and activity be.” (8)

**C. Missionary Zeal.** “Catechesis should have a strong missionary spirit – a spirit that will be all the more effective if they are seen to be convinced of what they say and are enthusiastic and courageous, without ever being ashamed of the Gospel.” (9) (cf. Rom 1:16)

1. Catechesis will try to be like the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep “until he finds it” (Lk 15:4), or like the woman with the lost drachma who would “search thoroughly until she had found it” (Lk 15:8).

2. Their convictions should be a source of apostolic zeal: “I have made myself all things to all in order to save some at any cost. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:22-23; cf. 2 Cor 1:15). (9)

“The burning zeal of St. Paul should inspire catechists to stir up their own zeal, which should be the response to their vocation, and which will help them to preach Christ boldly and work actively for the growth of the ecclesial community.” (9)

“Finally, catechists should not forget that the stamp of authenticity on the missionary spirit that is that of the cross.” (9)

**D. Devotion to Mary.** “The Spirituality of the Catechist, like that of every Christian and especially those involved in the apostolate, will be enriched by a deep devotion to the Mother of God.” (10) “They will find in Mary a simple and effective model, for themselves and others: ‘the Virgin Mary in her own life lived an example of that maternal love by which all should be fittingly animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church on behalf of the rebirth of humanity.’” (10; quoting LG 65) “The earliest Christian community was a model of this (cf. Acts 2-4), united around Mary the mother of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:14).” (10)

### **Some Practical Steps to Fostering a “Deep Spiritual Life” (22):**

“To be able to educate others in the Faith, catechists should themselves have a deep spiritual life. This is the most important aspect of their personality . . . the real catechist is a saint.” (22)

The best way to attain this interior maturity is an intense sacramental and prayer life. The following practices are proposed as key elements in the prayer life at least of the catechists who guide the community in a supplementary way, full-time catechists and those working closely with the parish priest:

1. Regular, even daily reception of the Eucharist, so as to nourish oneself with the “bread of life” (Jn 6:34), to form “a single body” with the community (cf. 1 Cor 10:17) and offer oneself to the Father along with the Lord’s body and blood (22);
2. Lived Liturgy in its various dimensions for the personal growth and for the help of the community;
3. Recital of part of the Divine Office;
4. Daily Meditation, especially on the Word of God, in an attitude of contemplation and response;
5. Personal Prayer, with special attention to Marian Prayer;
6. Frequent reception of the sacrament of penance, to ask pardon for faults committed and renew one’s fervor;
7. Participation on spiritual retreats;
8. Spiritual Direction

## **Four Key Elements Towards the spiritual development of the Catechist**

1. **Openness to the Word of God** – communicating God’s word requires an attitude which shares in the love of the Father, who wishes that all should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4);
  - “Which seeks communion with Christ, so as to share his own ‘mind’ and experience (Phil 2:5)
  - Openness to the Church through filial love, dedication and service. Missionary openness to the world in being open and attentive to the needs of the world knowing that they are called to work in and for the world, without however belonging completely to it.” (cf. Jn 17:14-21)
  
2. **Coherence and authenticity of Life** – “Before they preach the word, catechists must make it their own and live by it.
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  - Authenticity of life means a life of prayer, experience of God and fidelity to the action of the Holy Spirit.
  
3. **Missionary Zeal** – Catechists should have a strong missionary spirit – a spirit that will be all the more effective if they are seen to be convinced of what they say and are enthusiastic and courageous, without ever being ashamed of the Gospel.
  - Missionary openness to the world in being open and attentive to the needs of the world knowing that they are called to work in and for the world, without however belonging completely to it. (cf. Jn 17:14-21)
  - “I have made myself all things to all in order to save at any cost. I do it all for the sake of the Gospel” (1 Cor 9:22-23; 2 Cor 1:15)
  
4. **Devotion to Mary** – “The spirituality of the catechist, like that of every Christian and especially those involved in the apostolate, will be enriched by a deep devotion to the Mother of God.” They will find in Mary a simple and effective model, for themselves and others.”

## Practical Steps for Fostering a Deep Spiritual Life

1. **Daily Mass attendance.** The reception of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ in the Eucharist enables the catechist to partake in the bread of life and nourish oneself in Christ. (**Jn 6:34**)
2. **Recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours.** Liturgy of the Hours can be utilized from its various parts as a tool for prayer. The whole need not be recited; however, certain parts of the Divine Office can be instrumental in daily catechetical prayer.
3. **Daily Meditations.** Liturgy of the Hours, Rosary, Divine Mercy, Adoration, Scriptural meditations of God's word empower you to proclaim God's truth.
4. **Frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance;** asking and seeking forgiveness and pardon for sins committed against God, thus seeking renewal and conversion with Christ.
5. **Attending Retreats; specifically geared toward higher spiritual development.**
6. **Obtaining a Spiritual Director for spiritual direction in your daily activities.**