

Catechetical Sunday, September 16, 2012 **"Catechists and Teachers: Agents of the New Evangelization"**

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Imagine that you're looking to go on your dream vacation to an exotic place that you've never visited before in which people speak a different language. One way that I *don't* recommend is to simply show up in some vacation spot you've heard a little bit about and expect to have the time of your life, especially when you don't know the area or the customs and can't speak the language.

No, when you need to find your dream vacation spot in an unfamiliar and exotic location, you need to hire a travel agent: someone who has access to comprehensive listings of all the vacation spots in your price range and with recommendations for what to see and do and how to communicate with the people there. A good travel agent is someone who will look out for your best interests. A good travel agent is someone who will help you to gain access to your dream vacation destination.

What about when it comes to gaining access to another destination – the Kingdom of God?

Admit it. You're intrigued by the idea of residing in the Kingdom of God...not just at the end of your life, but right here and right now! It's on your bucket list. It's such an exotic and desirable destination, that people have actually given up their lives striving to experience it. You've heard stories of people who have changed zip codes and made the Kingdom of God their place of residence. You've seen the postcards from the saints down through the centuries who have given us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and have always concluded their messages with, "wish you were here."

There's only one problem. You're not sure how to gain access to this destination. You're not sure what people do in the Kingdom of God. Heck, you're not even sure if you speak the language spoken in the Kingdom of God. But you know one thing: it's where you want to go.

So, what can you do?

You need to find a travel agent. Not just any travel agent, but an agent who specializes in this one and only destination – the Kingdom of God. You see, we need agents who will look out for your best interests and help you to gain access to this dream destination so that you can begin enjoying the fullness of life that is promised there. We need agents who are familiar with the Kingdom of God, have real experience of the Kingdom of God, know the ins and outs of the kingdom of God and speak the language spoken in the Kingdom of God: a language of charity, justice, compassion, forgiveness, and praise of God the Father through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

Today, on Catechetical Sunday, we call forth, celebrate, and commission these unique agents who help us gain access to the Kingdom of God. These agents are our catechists.

On this Catechetical Sunday, 2012, we celebrate the theme of “Catechists and Teachers: Agents of the New Evangelization.”

Our catechists and religion teachers are indeed agents – they represent the Church and are sent forth to assist and guide others so that the People of God can have access to their ultimate destination - the Kingdom of God that is right here in our midst and yet often remains elusive. These catechists and religion teachers are reliable agents because they have dedicated themselves to living as residents of the Kingdom of God – they have learned or are learning or will be learning the customs and language spoken in the Kingdom of God and are reminding us that this is our destination. And they are offering the guidance and assistance we need to find our way there.

We call these catechists and religion teachers “Agents of the New Evangelization” because to evangelize is to proclaim the Good News. The Church today is experiencing a “new evangelization” because we are proclaiming the Kingdom of God to a world that faces new challenges and new opportunities. This new evangelization is not just the work of foreign missionaries, but of all the baptized and it is not just directed to people who have never heard of the Kingdom of God, but rather, is also directed to those who have heard of the Kingdom of God but have not yet embraced the notion that the Kingdom of God is their destination.

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals the key to being an effective agent of the New Evangelization: like St. Peter, agents of the New Evangelization are to boldly proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, and, in the same breath, are to proclaim his suffering, death, and Resurrection. To be an effective agent of the New Evangelization is to think as God thinks, not as human beings think.

Today, we pray for these agents of the New Evangelization – our catechists and religion teachers – that they may be filled with the Holy Spirit; that they may rekindle in all those they teach, a deep desire to set foot in and never leave the Kingdom of God; that they may teach others about the customs and language spoken in the Kingdom of God; and that they may assist all of us in gaining access to this dream destination spot – a destination that will not require you to move an inch from where you are right now but demands that you make the long and often difficult but exhilarating journey inward to the place where the Kingdom of God resides – within your heart.

Bon voyage!