

The Six Tasks of Catechesis #4: Teaching to Pray, or Praying Our Faith

The fourth of the Six Tasks of Catechesis is teaching to pray, or in terms of the remembering phrase HELP ME, praying our faith. Read what the bishops say:

Conversion to Christ and communion with him lead the faithful to adopt his disposition of prayer and reflection...

His prayer was always directed toward his Father. Catechesis should invite the believer to join Christ in the Our Father. Prayer should be the ordinary environment of all catechesis so that the knowledge and practice of the Christian life may be understood and celebrated in its proper context (NDC 20).

Let's look at the forms of prayer presented in Part Four of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Blessing, adoration, and praise are like complimenting God for his accomplishments and who he is. Petitions, including asking for forgiveness, are ways of placing our concerns and worries before God and expressing sorrow. When those concerns and worries are for others, that is intercession. Thanksgiving is a response to God's gifts.

Later in Part Four, the CCC speaks of the expressions of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. Much of our communication is vocal, and the same is true with prayer, whether we speak out loud or silently. In meditation we turn to Scripture, spiritual writings, icons, sacramentals, or the world around us, and we "see" the wonder of God or are challenged to conform ourselves to become more like God. As that relationship deepens, we reach a point where just being together is important. In our prayer life we call this *contemplation*.

Personal prayer is also addressed in the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

[Catechesis for prayer] is most effective when the catechist is a prayerful person who is comfortable leading others to prayer and to participation in liturgical worship. "When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit" (NDC 34).

Practicing what we preach about prayer is essential for catechetical leaders. If our ministry isn't based on a foundation of prayer it will fail. But it isn't just about saying prayers; it's about having a prayerful attitude. We need to pray always and in all ways. We should ask ourselves: *Do I set time aside each day for prayer? Am I familiar*

with CCC Part Four? Do I have a balanced prayer life that includes each of the forms of prayer? Do I do all the talking, or do I set time aside to let God get some words in through meditation and contemplation? Do I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me and give me the words when I am preparing to teach or meet with a difficult parent or student? Do I give thanks for the catechists, students, and parents? Do I begin teacher workshops with a prayer experience and offer a catechist retreat each year?

Teaching to Pray in the Classroom

Prayer in the classroom is more than setting some time aside to pray or a way to begin and close a lesson. It needs to permeate the class. Here are some practical tips for praying our faith in the classroom.

- Gather the catechists together before class for prayer, if that will work in your situation, or give them a prayer that they can say individually for the class before the children arrive.
- Check what the catechist manual says about the capacity of the age group being taught for different types of prayer. The manual will also indicate the formal prayers being taught that year. Have posters with the prayers to display in the week they are taught, and keep them up for several weeks. Teach not just the words but also the meaning of our traditional prayers. Give notes to parents, encouraging them to say these prayers with their children each day to help them learn. Be sure to send the prayers home with the students. Don't assume the parents know all of the prayers. Review by praying the prayer in the following weeks.
- Create classroom prayer centers, physically move to a prayer space in the room, and perhaps lower the lighting. Use a cross, holy water, or candles, if permitted.
- Vary your prayer experiences. Simple spontaneous prayer teaches children they can approach God and speak in their own words, placing their joys, sorrows, hopes, and concerns before him. Having reflective prayer time with music in the background can teach meditative prayer and provide quiet prayer experiences for students used to being surrounded by noise and busy-ness. Even young children are capable of meditation. It can be done, in age-appropriate ways, at all levels.
- Teach the various forms of prayer. Petitions and asking forgiveness aren't the only forms of prayer. We need to bless, praise, and adore, too. Developing an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving toward God demands that this form of prayer have a central place.

- Connect to liturgical actions and forms to help students learn liturgical prayer. Process to the prayer area, following someone carrying the Bible. When teaching First Holy Communion, teach the prayers of the Mass. Have the class compose petitions in the form of the Prayer of the Faithful.
- Have prayer partners for the classes. Invite parishioners to adopt a class and pray for the children each week. A tremendous untapped resource is the shut-ins of the parish. The prayer can go both ways—the shut-ins for the class and the class for the shut-ins.

What other ideas do you have for teaching children to pray?

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