

Bishop Caggiano
Address to Faith Formation Leaders
September 16, 2023

The General Directory for Catechesis was published in June 2020. It is written almost in a prayerful way. In that text, Pope Francis speaks of Kerygmatic catechesis. What in the name of the Lord does that really mean? It begs the question, what is the kerygma? In the gospel, Jesus says, what are you looking for? Come and see. And what he was referring to is himself for the kerygma as you and I know is the call of conversion so that one might accept the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is the author of eternal life in his death and resurrection. So before we get to all the other truths of faith, the one truth of faith is the foundation of all catechesis.

In St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus asks these apostles, who do you say that I am? Our ministry is to proclaim the answer to that question. He is my Lord and my God. Out of the words of Thomas, who unfortunately has the title of the doubter, when actually he was the only one who got it right at the beginning. So the kerygma is the joyful proclamation of salvation. How many of our people actually know that? How many of our people actually meditate on the offer of salvation?

How many of them actually understand the Lord to be their savior?

You see my friends with you, you think, "oh, stop it, of course they do." Look, that was the case. 435,000 people would be running to church because the only thing you need is salvation. I don't need new car. I don't need to have a facelife. I don't need a bigger bank account. All of that will die. And I love the people I love and I can't guarantee them happiness, joy, or eternal life in the end if we really needed salvation. Do we have the answer? Unfortunately my friends, we have evolved into a place where that is no longer a felt need. And that is why that that first premise is so revolutionary. The question you and I have to really struggle with: How do we help people to realize that need in a gentle, merciful and loving way before they encounter the death of a spouse or the crisis of health or something that's so profound that their entire world fell apart And at that moment it could either be a moment of conversion or a moment of despair and I've seen both in my ministry. So that's number one. It's kerygmatic catechesis.

Number two, Francis says what Paul said and John Paul said, and Benedict said, that is the principal audience of catechesis are parents. The principal audience is not children. Now let's think about that. It is adults.

Why? Because in the early church, infant baptism arose precisely because households came to faith. The adults led the way and they were the catechists of their children. Now of course as the church institutionalized, things change, but the emphasis still remained since the RCIA, which we have now renewed in the early church, was the principle way people came into the faith as adults in a process. And now in more recent times it has become an academic enterprise and our parents are asking us to form their children, not just educate them when they themselves are meant to be the formators and they don't have the tools to be formators because they themselves have never had the opportunity to be formed. So we are going to struggle with how do we continue to serve our young people but at the same time focus our attention to adults, to our parents, to those in church, to those who are, for example, parents in our Catholic schools and others who are tangentially related to us through sports and then go out into the world. And I don't know the answer to the question, I just know the question and we are going to figure out the answer together.

And then the third is, I already mentioned the RCIA. If you read the General Directory, isn't it surprising that Francis said that the model of old catechesis is the RCIA, the catechumenate. Now on the national level, I raised this at the USCCB and everybody just kind of gave me the look like just sit down and be quiet. Do us a favor. But the truth is that many who have gone through the RCIA do not continue in the practice of the faith.

And I know it's not because of a lack of effort on your part or your catechists or the people who walk with them, but it is something sobering to say if there are mixed results, why would we do everything according to the RCIA is that not actually following the wrong horse in wagon? But let me presume something. Perhaps what makes the RCIA absolutely brilliant in the moments of formation is what makes it weak once a person is fully initiated and you know where I'm going. That is the community that walked with them during formation was one of the principle ways they encountered Jesus Christ and was strengthened in discipleship. And when the community ends, it's no different than everything else I described. One of the things I want you to really consider in your leadership is how do we allow those communities to continue, not to segregate them, but to support them, to see whether or not the unrealized potential can be fully met. Because if it can, then that's the missing piece here. Our formation cannot be simply individually driven even for adults. It has to be communal, small communities that will invest in each other's life so that what you cannot witness to or teach, they will witness and teach amongst each other. That's formation.

Okay, two more points. For a thousand years we've been saying faith formation is holistic, it's lifelong, it's age appropriate. Correct? So you see how when we speak of this revolution, I could call it that, or evolution is more accurate. None of this is lost because if formation is not education, it's holistic, then it has to involve the mind, the heart, and the will. Truth, beauty and goodness. We're not changing that at all. If we say it is lifelong, if we say we are going to help form adults who will form their children, of course it's lifelong because adulthood ends when we die, right? And if it is age appropriate, it's just simply the, it is the insight to say, I'm going to teach truth in a way that is appropriate for you to comprehend. Our, our obligation is to teach effectively, not teach simply comprehensively. And what I can understand at 12 is different than what I can understand at 64 and nine months. If you were to teach me what Christian suffering meant when I was a teenager and if you were to ask me to articulate it now, it'd be very different, even I continue to learn as you. So we are not changing what you have heard all these years. We are giving it the broader context.

Okay? So how do we do this? I want you to write three things down please. These are the LaGuardia, layer cake, and Saruman.

So number one, LaGuardia, who has been to the new LaGuardia Airport? Who thinks it's a vast improvement movement? The other one, oh my God, the other one was disgrace. So what's amazing about the LaGuardia is they built a brand new airport while the old one kept running. And for all the complaints which we all had, and the cost which we all bemoan nonetheless, they actually kept the plane flying and did not crash it. So why do I say that? The first practical principle, my dear friends, is a few years ago, I said, blow it up, but I presumed you had already built something in its place.

We're not building from the embers. So what do we need to build so that we can take down later on what is not working? And I have ideas and you will have ideas, and in these forums that we have, we can talk about them. 'cause you're in the trenches. I am not. I'm more the three theoretician here, right? But that's where the truth is born. So what is the strategy in your parish, in your deanery, when you say, okay, in order to realize this, I need to first with my pastors and my colleagues build this so that this piece that is either insufficient, invective, we could literally kind of gradually get rid of it. That's one.

Second, the layer cake. I like the image because there is something to be created perhaps to be, the better image is to have it be born in our midst, which is the foundation of the cake. That is the one is to allow these opportunities in a very comprehensive and strategic way to be offered to every person who is baptized so that he or she can grow in his or her relationship with the Lord and be accompanied along the way. And that my friends is faith formation in its true meaning from birth to death. This foundation holds everything else. So the cake has to have its foundational layer. That is what's going to take years to build.

And then there are layers on top of it. And those layers we can mix and match depending on what the needs are. So there will be a layer to be added for sacramental preparation. But that is the second layer, or the third layer, or the icing on the cake. It's not the foundation. There will be marriage preparation. There's going to be bereavement, there's going to be the RCIA for those entering into the faith. Those are layers on the foundation. All those layers you have done great work in. The difficulties we've experienced is that we have not together built the foundation. That is what THE ONE is all about. So we have to bake a real cake, not cupcakes, one cake.

Now why Suramon? Well, because I need help. My all time favorite book was the trilogy Tolkien's trilogy, the Lord of the Rings.

I discovered them when I was in high school. I read them and reread them every summer until I became a bishop because I think it's brilliant. Absolutely. It's Christian, it is really a Christian parable. Anyway, Suramon, a wizard, the head of the Wizards, the good wizard. So he was good, fell into the orbit of sorrow, who is the Lord of all evil. And in a moment in the play, in the movie, he says (he be the father of all evil) says, Suramon, build me an army that is worthy of my honor. And of course he does. And it's destroyed because evil will destroy itself. So why am I saying this? Because I am saying to you, and I'm not the father of evil, I hope: build an army who will help you to do this.

You cannot do it alone. We cannot do it alone. So if we want to bring the church to renewal, we are going to have to live by the same methodology. Which means that there are communities of faith already in existence that need to have our principle attention. To go deeper into their own individual relationships with the Lord and to accompany one another - and I'm going to suggest my friends that your catechists are your prime audience. They are the beginning of the army we have to do. And once they understand and are convicted of this, then our parents will join the army and then our coaches will join the army. And I presume our pastors are part of the army. And if they are not, that is for me to deal with. That is not for you to deal with, for me as a father to them. But my sense is our priests are very much ready to do this. They have been sorely disappointed with so many initiatives we have tried over the last 40 years that their skepticism is well founded.

How do we work with our catechists? I want you to take everything I just said and apply it to them. Where do you allow them opportunities in truth, beauty and goodness to encounter Christ? And when we speak up truth, where do you and I, with Patrick's help, help to unlock the obstacles that prevent them from knowing the truth. That's where apologetics for the act of faith is sorely lacking. Because how many of your catechists have drunk the Kool-Aid of the outside world and presume that reason and faith are not friends, when in fact they are hand in hand? And I can go on and on. So I will be of any way I can to be of help. I will. And I've not mentioned this to Patrick, so I'm going to catch him by surprise, but it's not me. And that is, we mentioned, Patrick and I spoke about this last year, so now I'm going to tell you it is my burning desire to meet your catechists myself and to give to them what I'm giving to you. Because if there's going to be this evolution, somebody has to lead the charge and I'm happy to do it.

So we are gonna work out a schedule of meetings only for your catechists, yourselves, Patrick and me, perhaps a few to start so I can meet everyone within a relative amount of time. We'll figure out when, we'll figure out how. It will be in person and it will be by region. So they don't have to travel either. And it's going to be a presentation and a give and take. Because if you and I are on the same page with Patrick's leadership, then once I break open the question, then they, you can work with them to work through the answers. And it will take more than this year to do that. This is a normal practice. But I think to raise the army, they need to be at the front lines with you or this is not this is not going to work. So in addition to everything else that's going on in formation, which is tremendous for the catechist, I think they need to see the vision and wrestle with it as you and I are wrestling with it. So more to come about that in the next couple of weeks.

So I'm gonna stop there because I think I spoke too long anyway. Thoughts, reactions, thoughts?

[Comment from audience - I think it is important for you (bishop), to work with the priests.

There are two items for the priest. The first is this (catechesis), the second is liturgy. There's going to be a real, what's the word? Vivacious discussion about liturgy. The reason is because there are obviously legitimate ways and differences, but we need to come to a consensus on how the liturgy can be celebrated in an authentic reverent and beautiful.

Because it's the one when you come to the Eucharist, you should engage your mind, your heart, and your will. So we are now begun work on creating a school of preaching which will be have two lungs. The first would be for the preachers to have mentoring and ongoing formation, priests and deacons both. And the other lung is going to be a school of biblical study that would be for all the faith for everyone. And my dream, if the Lord grants me all my dreams, one of the dreams is in a few years, 3 or 4 years, maybe it takes that long, is that every parish in this diocese on a given night, like our Protestant brothers and sisters do it on Wednesdays to have Bible study in every parish of the diocese. And part of the Bible study would be reflection on the Sunday videos to come so that when a person comes to Mass, they've already heard it, they've already prayed over it, they've understood it, and then they're ready to be fed all the stuff that doesn't belong in the homily - it belongs in study and then come to mass so the Holy Spirit can touch your heart.

He's already fed your mind. That's some of the architecture of THE ONE. We must build consensus with each other.

And I'll just give you one example of what I mean. In my heart of hearts, as I've grown older, I've gone to different places, I have come to realize I need to surrender to what the Holy Spirit is showing. And more and more places, more and more of the faithful are kneeling for holy communion. And my ministry is not to stop that. My ministry is perhaps to allow it as an option for people if their heart is so moved to do so. And in the United States, as you know, the norm is standing. But there may be a way where just as you have an option to receive in the hand or on the tongue, is to have an option to receive standing or kneeling - whatever you want. And that's a question that I'm going to raise to the priests and let's debate it, talk about it. This is a work of Holy Spirit. So one of the things about us in leadership is can we read the signs of Holy Spirit? Are we humble enough to read the signs of spirit is because if you are not, don't do this ministry.

[Comment from audience: Please talk more about parents as catechists]

That is an excellent point. Which I had not yet thought of until you just mentioned it - because a lot of our catechists are parents. So you are actually engaging both your catechists and the cell that could work with a

[Comment from audience: I would like to get our liturgical ministers more involved].

Could you imagine all the Readers and EMHCs of the parish gathering together every two or three months simply to share a meal, to pray together and to share faith and then get their schedules. Absolutely right. Discipleship is the foundation for ministry. So ministry day when we have it in a couple weeks, which I guess two weeks from today, is the outgrowth of discipleship. So discipleship has to be nurtured so that ministry actually becomes a vehicle of grace and not just something that you do. So again, they go hand in hand. Yes, this is where we're moving to and it won't be easy, but this is where we're moving to.

[Comment from audience: I love the idea of gathering people for meals - catechists, families, and others].

The three fs - family, faith and food. Let me ask you a question. When are you planning the opportunities for your catechists, who are on the front lines here - think of food, faith and family. You see my point? Gather your catechists - not to talk about what they're doing, their lesson plans, all this stuff - just to pray so that they really become brothers and sisters in faith. And if you are doing it already, then do more of it and tie it into what we're talking about.

[Comment from audience: How can we improve what we do with Confirmation]

The layer the cake is the strategy. When I first proposed the idea of creating confirmation, moving into the sixth grade, it was motivated by two, two desires. First psychosexually, young people are developing much faster than when I was a kid in ancient times. And they need the grace of the holy spirit before they really begin to struggle with questions of chastity, purity, sexual relationship, and all the rest which can devastate a life when you're in the eighth grade. So that's one, it's just a bow to the reality that these young people are in a world that is forcing them to make choices. That when at least I was their age, I didn't even contemplate their choices. Again, it's all about the Holy Spirit. That's number one.

But number two, it presumed that we would be building the bottom of the cake. That's why I'm delighted with Norwalk and Fairfield and Stratford because in a sense, in two of the pilots, it would be starting the foundation for young people in Stratford with Colin's help (new director of discipleship). We are going to build over the next few years the foundation for all the baptized because confirmation should be a proximate preparation for the sacrament. If you have the foundation, you could do it in eight weeks.

It's really preparing yourself for the reception of this next step because the foundation is the journey and past. Some pastors have shifted the age of confirmation without attending to the foundation. So that's why we have to join forces to begin to build this. And my hope would be if this foundation is truly engaging, and they begin to encounter the presence of Christ, then we won't have to force them to come to us by holding confirmation as the carrot. Because that just reinforces graduation. When you get the carrot, what do you do? You leave. The other thing I'm going say is, and it may sound judgmental, but Youth ministry is not about engagement and entertainment. Because if that's the case, Hollywood will trump anything you do any day. It's not about pizza and gathering for donuts. It's lovely. Of course it's lovely. It is about encountering Jesus Christ and

walking together with others who love you. That is what I'm talking about. That is what built the church. That is what allowed the Christian, like today's the feast of Ss Cornelius and Cyprian. One guy got decapitate and the other one was executed by the emperor. And they lived in a time of controversy. If you recall in that period in the church, you were baptized, all your sins were forgiven. That was it. Good luck. 'Because if you sinmortally, you are done out of the church into hell. Congratulations. There was no sacrament involved yet of penance and reconciliation.

The great controversy that arose as a result of the Decian persecution was whether or not the Church could pardon and receive back into the Church those who had apostacized in the face of martyrdom.

The Holy Spirit had not yet made reconciliation clear. There was a whole group in the church that said, tough luck card expired, see you. But then the church evolved to say there is of heaven, there is a path forward because God's mercies are endless, so penance and baptism are in linked. So in a sense for our young people, they're going do a lot of things. None of that disqualifies them from God at all. But they have to be able to reveal in their heart of hearts what it's they're struggling with in the sacrament and in their daily lives. And we help walk with them. It's a holiness conversion. They can't do it alone, nor can their parents do it alone.

Another thing we will do to help young people, is that we are going to give rebirth to the Catholic Service Corps. It's going to be a guild, it will be intergenerational and it will be built on virtue. And the call to goodness, which manifests itself in the works of charity, spiritual and corporate works. We can talk about this later, but many of you are involved in service. And you heard me say, stop talking about the word service, not because they shouldn't do good things, it is because I want to build a foundation that you could overlay the works of service. But I want the foundation so they can become virtuous, prudent, temperance - all that the faithful need.

[Comment from audiance about faith formation being a lifelong process - how can we do that well?].

You can teach the truth of the faith in the classroom and outta the classroom. So in a sense, once they've received confirmation, you're still going to teach them the doctrines of the church, the moral teachings of the church, the social gospel, which would very much engage them. But you don't necessarily have to do it in the classroom like you did the sacramental preparation. You can do it in other ways because you always have to teach the truth. The question is how do you do it in an effective way that includes, but it's not exclusively in the classroom. Once you have gone past confirmation.

Thank you very much.