At the end of his announcement of the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis invoked the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy: “Let us henceforth entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey: our penitential journey, our year-long journey with an open heart …” This invocation of Mary, Mother of Mercy was underscored by the announcement that the Holy Year will begin on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Let’s think about these two titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary together and ask ourselves how they are related.

THE BLESSED MOTHER – BORNE BY GOD’S GRACE AND MERCY
Mary is the Immaculate Conception. This is how she identified herself to St. Bernadette. That she was immaculately conceived does not mean that she existed outside the economy of redemption, on her own independent track, but rather that she, by the merits of her Son, was redeemed in a unique way, preserved immune from all stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception. The “stain” of original sin is, of course, not a physical stain, but rather it refers to the impairment of freedom and therefore of the ability to love. This is the legacy of original sin. For this reason, either we are afraid of the consequences of choosing the good, or some other alternative seems more attractive. We can even choose the right alternative but for the wrong reasons or for mixed motives. Consider the power disparity that exists between Mary, a creature, and her Creator! Although it would not have been a sin to say “no,” Mary could have said “yes” to her vocation out of fear of God’s power or out of attraction to the status God could provide her! In a case like this, “in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith … it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God’s grace.”

God’s grace is God’s mercy, and therefore Mary had to be wholly borne by God’s mercy. God’s mercy elected her for this vocation, and in and by God’s mercy she was able to assent with perfect freedom to God’s request. Because she is the Immaculate Conception, her whole being is defined by God’s mercy, and her “yes” is a completely unhindered act of assent to all of God’s merciful plans towards humankind that come to their fruition in the Incarnation. She is the “Mother of Mercy” in the sense that her motherhood is a gift of God’s mercy, and also in the sense that she is literally the Mother of the Incarnate Word, who is God’s mercy extended to us.

Devotion to Mary, Mother of Mercy, helps us realize that the Incarnation, as God’s greatest work of mercy, is not an abstract concept but is a Person. “Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2:6-7). Devotion to Mary deepens our awareness of how far that “self-emptying” mercy went, namely, to the point where the “Almighty became weak for us,” in other words, to the point where he became the direct
opposite of almighty, a helpless baby who “uttered crying noises like all other children” and was completely dependent upon his mother. The divine compassion is concrete, not abstract, and the more devoted to Mary we are, the more a vista of the depth of this compassion, or mercy, dawns on our spiritual vision and we cry out: “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven!” (Gen 28:17) The mercy of God is the gate of Heaven, and in contemplating its awesomeness we stand on Heaven’s threshold! There is nothing more powerful than the contemplation of God’s self-emptying mercy to prompt conversion.

The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.

BEGINNING WITH SPIRITUAL CONVERSION
This is the “spiritual conversion” that Pope Francis mentioned in his homily announcing the Year of Mercy, when he said that the journey of mercy is “a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion...” Pope Francis continued, “we want to live this year in the light of the Word of the Lord: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’” (cf. Lk 6:36). Those most inclined to show mercy, to do the works of mercy, are those who are most deeply aware of the mercy they’ve received. In light of the mercy we receive, we can begin to see the hardness of heart in our lives—whether towards a family member, a fellow worker, the vulnerable in our midst, the poor, our enemies, or even God Himself—for what it is, and repelled by its ugliness, we are moved to do better. But the Catechism makes it clear that the primary impulse towards conversion “is in discovering the greatness of God’s love.” It continues, “The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.” Quoting Clement of Rome, the Catechism urges us, “Let us fix our eyes on Christ’s blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation, it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.” In other words, the primary motivation towards the converted life is not the ugliness of our sins, but our realization of how precious the blood of Christ—his outpouring of mercy—is, and we begin to want to participate in something so precious and so awesome on the giving end as well as on the receiving end. Travelling the road of mercy, we want to cross the threshold of Heaven.

A MAP FOR THE ROAD OF MERCY
How do we participate in the giving and receiving of mercy? We Catholics have a handy little manual of mercy, a roadmap, as it were, for the journey of mercy. This is drawn up in two lists of the “acts of mercy.” The spiritual and corporal. The corporal works of mercy: To feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit and ransom prisoners, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and bury the dead. The spiritual works of mercy: To admonish sinners, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, to pray for the living and the dead. The works of mercy, taken together, describe a life structured by mercy, and they invite the imagination into the full dimensions of mercy that reach into the misery of our world at every level. The works of mercy are also, in a way, a thumbnail description of the dimensions of human dignity, of what, in a sense, is owed a human person who is in any of the conditions of affliction or misery or need mentioned, and that is all of us in some way or another. The life dedicated to the works of mercy is the life dedicated to the affirmation of human dignity and so to the praise of the Creator who endowed human beings with such dignity and came among us as Incarnate mercy. The works of mercy, therefore, are works of praise and worship to God, Creator and Redeemer.

Since the very meaning of human life is to offer such worship, the life dedicated to the works of mercy is the most fulfilling life, the “happy life” to use classical terminology. It is indeed the life at the threshold of the Gate of Heaven.

Realizing this, we can see immediately that the problem of how to participate in the giving as well as of the receiving of mercy is actually not an easy one! It’s not enough to pile up works of mercy and then think we have offered the requisite praise to God, for even the works of mercy are prone to distortion. In a famous section of The City of God, Augustine analyzes what it means to worship God. He proposes that the only act that everyone recognizes as due to God and only to God is sacrifice. He then further proposes that the only acceptable and true sacrifice, from a biblical point of view, is misericordia, mercy or compassion, and that all exterior “works of mercy” or “acts of compassion” (depending on how one translates opera misericordiae) are only truly merciful or compassionate if they are the signs of an interior act of sacrifice, if they are done for the sake of God. Only then do they attain the stature of the worship of God. One might react to this by saying, “but the whole point of the works of mercy is that they are done for the sake of the neighbor!” In fact, though, anything done for the sake of God alone, and truly for his sake—in response to his initiative of mercy, as we have seen—is done, we could say, for no ulterior motive. Only then is it truly a sacrifice. Only then is it truly and fully done for the neighbor. For, let’s face it, it is easy to slip into the works of mercy or compassion for mixed motives. It is easier to feel compassionate towards the rich (because they can help us in return), towards the powerful (because we would like the status that comes from association with them), and towards those who will praise us (even if the praise is a form of self-congratulation or self-righteousness in our hearts). Unlike Mary, however, we all carry the taint
of original sin, that diminishment of our freedom which makes it impossible, on our own, to make a pure self-gift, a pure act of worship, and therefore a pure work of mercy or act of compassion.

THE EUCHARISTIC LIFE AND OUR CONTINUAL PURIFICATION

The solution, as Augustine explains, is not an abstract but concrete work of mercy in time and history, one so profound that it is the one true and completely unmixed act of worship ever offered to God. We have already encountered it! It is the self-emptying of the Word of God into solidarity with the human race in our condition of self-inflicted misery. It is the passion and death of the Incarnate Word. But not simply as past events. Otherwise we are dealing in abstractions. In the Resurrection, God the Father accepted this act of worship by his Incarnate Son. It lives anew; it transcends its original time and place, and in the Eucharist this greatest Work of Mercy is once again made present for us. We can enter into the hour of Christ’s total self-gift on the Cross and receive the gift of communion with this greatest Work of Mercy. We are ready to sacrifice even our own works of mercy in gratitude for this one, offering them to the Father in praise for the gift we have received. We receive them back, in a way, as his work, enlivened with his life.

The Eucharistic life is thus the life of mercy, and the life of mercy is the Eucharistic life. The more we receive Holy Communion, the more our life becomes a participation in the perfect act of worship, of self-gift, of compassion and mercy, which we could never give ourselves. We don’t have to obsess about the imperfections in our own works of mercy because the Eucharistic life is the life of continual purification, transformation and conversion of ourselves and all our works into the one act of compassion that binds us into One Body as Church and sends us out as missionaries of mercy, as the true sacrificial presence of Christ in the world. We learn to subsist on the Bread of Heaven rather than on our own private stores, on the sweet taste of a growing gratitude for the Precious Blood shed on our behalf and given to us at every Mass. Our gratitude becomes, in turn, a delight in self-gift that purifies our works of mercy of their mixed motives, little by little, and makes of them one continuous sacrifice of praise for all of the gifts the Creator has given us. In a truly perfected soul, this roots out the seeds of violence completely, something we see in the legends of St. Francis. Even the animals could sense that Francis had rooted out these seeds of violence by his configuration to the most burning love of Christ crucified, and all of them, rabbits, birds, fish, lambs, and wolves, approached his bosom as an oasis of mercy in a violent world.

If we undertake the works of mercy in union with Christ crucified, made present in the Eucharist, they make of the whole world a place of Eucharistic presence, a place where there are true refuges from violence, misery and hatred. This mercy makes the world itself a little more like Heaven. “All the way to Heaven is Heaven” for those who live the merciful life, the Eucharistic life, in which we have not only the Gate of Heaven, but Heaven on earth.

To return to our starting point, in this context devotion to the Mother of Mercy takes the form of a contemplation of the final destiny of our pilgrimage of mercy because we see in her the fullness of the redemption, which the whole Church, and we hope the whole of Creation, will attain. “The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of his love.” Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is not worship of Mary, but contemplation of and worship of the mercy that transfigured the whole of her being, body and soul, and made her the Eschatological Icon of the Church, completely free, completely purified, completely “deified.” The Immaculate Conception is a person, not a concept. May our devotion to her intensify our zeal to be perfected in this mercy, too and thereby direct us with ever-renewed vigor to the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of mercy and the means of our perfection in mercy, of which she is, after all, the Mother.

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1 Pope Francis, Homily, March 13, 2015.
2 See CCC, pars. 491-92; Lumen Gentium arts. 53, 56.
3 CCC, par. 490.
4 Augustine, Sermon 212.1.
5 Origens, On First Principles 2.6.2.
7 CCC, par. 1432.
8 See Augustine, City of God 10.4-6.
9 Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, art. 24.
10 See CCC, par. 973.

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In the spring of 2014, I spent some time in an atrium conducting informal research for my doctoral investigation of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Though I have received some training in all three Levels of CGS, I have not served as a primary CGS catechist and knew I needed more direct contact with the work. On my second day in the Level II atrium, I was invited by 7-year-old Dominic to join him in a work on the structure of the Mass. This particular work is designed to aid the child’s understanding of the link between Jesus’ offering of himself on Holy Thursday and Good Friday and his continued offering of himself at each Mass.

I was struck by Dominic’s level of concentration as he arranged the particular elements of the Mass. In the course of his work, which took a little negotiating on his part, he paused a moment and said to me, “How did Jesus do it?”

“Do what?” I replied cautiously.

“How does Jesus give his body to everyone? He’s a person.”

“What kind of a person?” I asked in return.

“God,” was the firm reply. “But how does he do it?” (Emphasizing that he clearly wanted more of the mystery.)

I paused remembering the wisdom of Sofia Cavalletti and thought to myself, “Less is more. Turn to the Holy Spirit who wants to show him.”

“It is a great mystery, Dominic. Have you asked the Holy Spirit to show you how Jesus does this?”

We prayed in silence. He began again.

“You know what else I don’t get?”

My heart began to pound—Behold! Jesus in the Temple putting questions to the scribes! After all, I am a Dominican sister with two Masters and currently completing a doctorate, yet here sat before me one wrestling first hand with the profound mysteries of our Faith.

“What else don’t you get, Dominic?”

“I don’t get how Jesus is God and the Father is God. Are there two Gods?”

I thought to myself... “If only St. Thomas Aquinas or St. Patrick were here!” And then it struck me, here was the chance to rescript my years as a ‘catechism based catechist.’ Trusting that all I’ve learned from Sofia would actually work, I turned to the Holy Spirit and to the Scriptures and ventured forth.

“Dominic, your question is a very great one. Indeed, one that the greatest theologians have asked and still ponder. What does Jesus say about this?” He did not know and so opening my Bible I said. “Well, in the Scripture Jesus says, ‘The Father and I are one.’ So can there be two gods?”

“No,” was his gentle reply, but I could see on his face that the question still burned. I pressed on.
“What else did Jesus say? He spoke of the Father and of the Holy Spirit but he never said ‘I am the Father.’ He never said, ‘I am the Holy Spirit’ just ‘the Father and I are one’ and ‘my Father will send the Holy Spirit to you.’ So is Jesus the same person as the Father? Is he the same person as the Holy Spirit?”

“No. They are both God. They are all three God.”

A very long pause followed and I prayed fervently to the Holy Spirit to enlighten Dominic’s mind that was so eager to penetrate the sublime mystery of the Trinity. Finally his face rested and I observed a satisfaction and peace. I ventured forth one more time.

“It is a great mystery, Dominic, and I don’t understand how it works, but what I can tell you is what Jesus says to us in Scripture. ‘The Father and I are one.’ So we believe there is only one God who is three Divine Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”

He nodded thoughtfully and then the dam broke!

“OH!” He exclaimed. “That’s how he does it!” His eyes were so big and so bright that I laughed having forgotten our original theological speculation on the mystery of the Eucharist. Dominic had linked it all together: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Eucharist, the Trinity. “The Holy Spirit does it!” “The Holy Spirit helps Jesus to give his Body to everyone!”

He looked at me expectantly, not for an answer but for the recognition of the awesome truth. “Yes.” I smiled. “At Mass, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is God, that Jesus can be present in each host and that every person can receive his Body.”

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Ever Ancient, Ever New: Encounter-Driven Catechesis
By: Katie Prejean

I was seven years old when I came home from school one day and told my dad that I thought religion class was silly. All we’d done in class that day was color a picture of Jesus walking on water, and after I decided to give Jesus a streak of neon green highlighter in his hair, I’d been fussed at for being disrespectful to our Lord. In that moment I was convinced that religion class was a waste of my time.

That attitude continued well into high school, when year after year, I felt as if the same concepts were being repeatedly drilled into my head: There are seven sacraments, the Holy Spirit inspired Sacred Scripture, the pope is infallible, and Catholicism was started by Jesus himself and is therefore the arbiter of all truth and everyone else who believes in other “flavors” of Christianity are wrong.

Sadly, “this Catholic stuff is silly and repetitive” attitude isn’t unique among the average 12 to 18 year-old students that sit in our classrooms, participate in our youth group events, and attend the mandatory parish religious education programs we so diligently and faithfully run. Many, if not most, of the students who sit at their desks listening to the lecture, eating the free pizza at the weekly youth night, and completing the workbook pages in the parish hall are made to do so by their well-intentioned parents who are as equally stymied by the true necessity of life-long, intentional spiritual education and formation.

It’s obvious that there is a grave crisis in the church of today: many of us, youth and adults alike are merely jumping through hoops constructed by well-meaning priests and lay ministers to “punch our cards” and earn the title of “good Catholic”. Or, in perhaps an even worse way, people ignore the hoops altogether and walk away, convincing themselves the church is not necessary and faith is a luxury you can choose to have or ignore. We have shifted from the ideal church of vibrant, active, full participatory, faith-filled believers to one of box-checking, list-making, “I have to do this because someone told me to,” in-name-only Catholics or, worse yet, non-believers entirely.

Making Faith Relevant
Blame for this falls not merely on the person with the attitude. Fault also lies with the practitioners of catechesis who have been charged with the immensely important duty of teaching an ever-ancient faith in an ever-changing world. If we truly want to answer the critically important call to teach the faith, we have to do it in such a way that goes beyond color sheets, workbook pages, hour-long lectures, painfully uncomfortable small group discussions, and over-the-top gimmicks. We have to teach the truth in a clear, bold, vibrant, relevant, and approachable way, and we must do so ultimately remembering that the truth is not merely a series of ideas and concepts collected into dusty books carried around by old men in Rome. As teachers, youth ministers, parish volunteers, DREs, pastors, and even everyday people who want to live the faith, we must remember that teaching an ever ancient faith in an ever changing world first requires recognizing that the truth is a person that came to dwell among us 2,000 years ago and will be with us always, until the end of the age.

Encounter-Driven Catechesis
In 2012, St. Louis Catholic High School, both my alma mater and the place where I teach freshman theology, became a “1:1 laptop based school.” Every student and teacher has a laptop or tablet that is used for everything from taking notes to grading assignments to accessing digital textbooks. While the technology is certainly useful for academic purposes (if for no other reason than I know my students are able to access my reminder e-mails about upcoming tests), at times it proves to be a hindrance — more of a distraction than an educational tool as Google and Wikipedia are the only two sites accessed during research for example. About three months into the 2012 school year, I began to notice a disturbing habit among my students. As soon as they came into the classroom and sat down at their desk, they’d
immediately pull their computer out of its carrying case, open it up, and return to whatever website they were on, e-mail they were reading, or (if I didn’t catch them quick enough) game they were playing. The boisterous, loud classroom I remembered as a student was largely gone, replaced with the dulcet tones of the click-clacking of keys or the occasional, “Hey, did you see this?” followed by smirks and quiet giggles among students. I didn’t have to say, “Settle down” or, “Please give me your attention” because of volume. Instead, I was competing for my students to even look me in the eye when they came through the door and class began. They were enamored with the 13-inch computer screen in front of them, much like their eyes were glued to their 5-inch phones all other hours of the day.

We’re living in a world with far more access to instant connection than any other era, but we are far less connected. We have social media, but fewer occasions to be social. We can communicate with anyone, anywhere, at any time, and because of this, we are distracted from the importance of the ones we share time and space with. As I watched my students come in day after day and immediately stare at screens of the computers, it began to dawn on me that this generation – perhaps more than any other – was quickly forgetting how to have authentic, genuine, personable, fruitful encounters with their family members, peers, authority figures, or even complete strangers. And, if they cannot encounter one another, then they are certainly going to struggle with encountering Jesus Christ. Whether we are in the traditional classroom, within youth ministry or parish religious education programs, in RCIA formation, or sacramental preparation, the greatest challenge we face as catechizers is fostering a culture of intentional encounter, with both others and Christ, in an encounter-less world.

“COME AND SEE”
In the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel, there is a beautiful and poignant moment when Jesus and two of his soon-to-be followers. As Jesus is walking by, John the Baptist boldly announces him as the “Lamb of God.” This title piques the interest of Andrew and another unnamed man whom we can assume is John, the author of the gospel. The two men approach Jesus. He asks them what they are looking for. Hoping to find out where Jesus is staying, they are quite surprised with his answer. “Come and see,” Jesus tells them, and so they go and spend the day with him. This moment when Jesus says these three simple words is so profound and powerful that Andrew and John even remember what time it was. Rather than outline his agenda for the next three years or give them an address of the place he would be spending the night, Jesus instead extended an invitation for Andrew and John to come and simply be with him. He is giving them an opportunity to personally encounter him, an encounter which changes both their lives and the lives of countless others forever. That day, Andrew and John saw and spoke with Jesus. They spent time and shared space with Jesus. They personally met the Lord, and as Andrew would later tell his fisherman brother, Simon, they had found the Messiah. This encounter with Christ so profoundly changed Andrew that he told his brother, who is eventually named Peter and given the keys to the kingdom. The simple invitation to “come and see” became the most profound, life-changing encounter of Andrew and John’s lives.

It is an encounter with Jesus, just like this one, that deeply transforms a person. Meeting Jesus face to face in the Eucharist, in the prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture, in the confessional receiving forgiveness, or in the people surrounding us daily, more fully forms us in his image and likeness. This personal encounter with Jesus Christ is at the heart of our very existence, and the foundation upon which we minister and serve. This encounter is the root of all we do as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, because it is personally meeting Jesus that we begin to understand not just what we profess or why we do so, but in whom we truly believe. If we are going to change the tide of the frequent “this is silly” attitude, we must do so because we are fostering occasions of encounter that make our catechetical efforts effective, meaningful, transformative, and relevant.

THE SEVEN STEP PROCESS
I like making lists, especially if they tell me what I need to do next. As a person juggling full-time teaching with part-time youth ministry and traveling for speaking engagements, lists are the only thing that keep me grounded and sane. As I came to realize how little my students interacted with and encountered both each other
and Jesus Christ, I began to write down the things I was doing to help end the trend. Over time, I noticed I was repeating the same seven steps over and over again, which has since become a listing of a method of education and catechesis I use in my classrooms, with my youth group teens, and at conferences and retreats across the country.

**STEP 1: EXTEND THE INVITATION**

Once upon a time, I called an atheist student of mine insane because he didn’t believe in God and wouldn’t believe me after I explained Aquinas’ proofs of God’s existence. Needless to say, calling him insane was a surefire way of assuring he would be turned off to anything else I said or did for the rest of the school year. Rather than humbly engaging my student and inviting him to explore a different way of thinking, I forced the truth upon him. Shoving something down someone’s throat does no one any good, least of all the person doing the shoving. Instead, it locks us into the dangerous mentality of “I’m right, you’re wrong, deal with it.”

As catechizers and evangelizers, it is our duty to invite our students, friends, co-workers, and complete strangers to an encounter with Jesus Christ. It is never our job to force them to meet him, demand they listen, and insist they believe what we say. First and foremost, our task is to invite them to experience, hear about, learn, and perhaps come to believe the truth that we know has transformed our own lives and can influence their own.

**STEP 2: TEACH JESUS**

Too often we end up spending our precious time teaching about Jesus, forgetting that it is our primary duty to help people personally encounter Jesus. If the students we work with memorize the Ten Commandments and can recite the beatitudes, then we have done nothing more than teach them a great party trick for college. If they are not following those commandments and living those beatitudes, then we have failed them. I have slowly learned that my job in the classroom is ultimately to introduce my students to Jesus Christ and help them get to know him, which will naturally lead to falling in love with him. The best antidote to any problem our students struggle with and the best answer to any question they may have is to point them in the direction of the truth, which is not an idea, but a person.

While there is a need to teach the technicalities of the faith, it should be our primary focus to introduce the people we catechize to the person of Jesus Christ. And what do they find when they meet him? They meet the Jesus that calmed the storm, mastering the wind and storm. They meet the Jesus that heals the woman with a 12-year hemorrhage. They meet the Jesus that fed over 5,000 people and raised Lazarus from the dead. And as they meet the Jesus of miracles, they also see that Jesus took naps, and asked questions. They see that Jesus was hungry and that he wept for his friend. The sooner we realize that people are not transformed by ideas and concepts alone, the quicker we will do the most important thing we could ever hope to do as catechists: help people meet the Savior of the world and discover their identity within him, the very person who gives meaning to their existence.

**STEP 3: BE JOYFULLY REAL**

When our students, neighbors, coworkers, friends and total strangers meet us, they should see a person radiating the joy and love of Jesus Christ. This does not mean we are constantly giggling or always have a toothy grin plastered across our face, but it does mean that when anyone sees us, they should realize that we have an internal disposition that rises above the fray of the world and allows us to constantly delight and rest in the love of the Son while we pursue the will of the Father.

Our joy for the love of the Lord, and for the great task of catechizing to which we have been called, should be the animating principle of our lives. This joy deeply rooted in our hearts isn’t merely a marketing tactic to get people “to the pews” or “sitting up straight in the desks”. It’s a disposition which points to Jesus Christ, encouraging encounter with him. If we are the only face of Christ someone sees, and possibly the only gospel someone “reads” that day, then the Christ they meet and the gospel we share needs to be one of unceasing love, merciful welcome, and deep, brimming joy.

**STEP 4: RECOGNIZE OUR SHORTCOMINGS**

For a long time I avoided the phrase, “I don’t know.” It wasn’t until I caught myself making up an answer to a student’s question that I realized I was being unjust to both them and myself. If, in the course of our catechizing efforts, we find ourselves unaware of something, there is no harm in admitting we do not know the answer to a question. If nothing else, this alters us to holes in our own knowledge and encourages us to grow and learn more for ourselves. It also humanizes the catechizing process. We are not the arbiters of all truth, nor do we have all the answers for everyone. God cannot be placed in a box, and our faith is filled with holy mystery. The sooner we recognize and reflect this the sooner the evangelization efforts of our catechesis will be successful. Recognizing our shortcomings does not harm our teaching: it enhances it as it forces us to seek new knowledge and humanizes us as fellow pilgrims on the journey to the truth.
STEP 5: FRAME THE GREATER STORY
Jesus Christ is not a fairytale character, and the Bible is not a collection of mythical stories. Jesus Christ is our Savior, Word made flesh dwelling among us, and the Bible is God’s inspired Word, given to us to study, reflect upon, and live out. When we teach Jesus as a distant figure and place the Bible in a “once upon a time” context, the story becomes cold and aloof. The greatest thing we can do for the people we catechize is frame the story of salvation in a personal context, showing them that they are a unique part of salvation history.

When Moses was told God’s name at the burning bush, this is not simply a cool moment defying the laws of physics. It is a moment showing us the great personal love of God who wants his chosen people to know his very identity, existence itself. When Job is struggling with the death of his family, illness, sudden poverty, and judgmental friends, we can see that suffering is ultimately a redemptive experience drawing us closer to the Lord. As the resurrected Christ walks on the road to Emmaus with two disciples, we see that he is truly “remaining with us to the end of the age.”

Every moment in the Scriptures is a moment that can be personally applied to the spiritual journey, and when it is taught as such, the written Word of God is as alive as the Incarnate Word in Israel in 30 A.D. Furthermore, when we teach and illustrate how this great story of salvation is directly applicable to our spiritual journey in this moment, we see that we are characters within the story, not merely spectators watching from afar. Not only is Jesus taught and met, but we also can meet ourselves and others in a more intimate and profound way.

STEP 6: LOVE THEM TO HEAVEN
We put in a lot of effort to do what we do. There are endless hours of time dedicated to what seems like a small drop in the bucket in the lives of the people we catechize. Our time, energy, talent, and treasure is poured into the formation of the hearts, minds, and souls of the people we teach, and the likelihood of us ever seeing the effects of our efforts are slim to none. We will be forgotten and perhaps even misremembered, and the concepts we teach may become fuzzy. But, in the end, that's okay. If we successfully introduced them to Jesus Christ, and if we helped them encounter him and begin building a relationship with him, then we have done our duty.

Leon Bloy, a French novelist who converted to Catholicism as a young man after encountering a few holy men and women while working in Paris, wrote the following: “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life is to not become a saint.” This is our job as catechists: to get our students, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and complete strangers to heaven. We do this by joyfully and humbly teaching them and providing chances for them to meet Jesus Christ, and in the end, we will hopefully one day see them in heaven.

STEP 7: RINSE AND REPEAT
The time we have with the people we catechize is often brief. A year in the classroom, a semester in the RCIA program, a few weeks of confirmation preparation, and then it’s on to a new group of people to teach. We repeat this cycle over and over again, developing our own style and methods along the way. We nuance what we do, learn what to say, and how to say it. We acknowledge our moments of failure, and correct our mistakes, and then we start the process over, ultimately recognizing that we ourselves are changed year after year.

Our world is overrun with mediocrity. Many people, myself included, sometimes only put in the least amount of effort required. But what we do as catechists must always go beyond the bare minimum. Catechizing, the work of evangelization, is the proclamation of the truth. It is the sharing of the gospel. Teaching Jesus to a student, neighbor, coworker, friend, or complete stranger is the most important thing any of us could ever hope to do, and as such, evangelization deserves our very best efforts. Evangelization demands excellence. This requires us to provide opportunities to encounter Christ in a world filled with so few authentic encounters with each other. This means we have to teach Jesus and introduce him as the Word made flesh dwelling among us before we require the memorization of concepts. This means we have to be joyfully honest and openly humble, showing the love of the Lord and our own occasional shortcomings in our knowledge. This means we must frame things in the context of the greater story, illustrating how we are a part of salvation history. This means we love people deeply and work fervently to show them heaven. There is no better task, no higher calling, no greater purpose in life than to help someone avoid the great tragedy of not becoming a saint. This is why we catechize. This is why we go beyond ourselves and invite people to meet and fall in love with Christ, and if we do it well, then we won’t fail. We will have fostered a culture of encounter with Jesus, and if we’re lucky, we’ll meet and fall in love with him ourselves as well.

Katie Prejean has her BA in Theology from the University of Dallas and is currently working on her Masters in Theological Studies from the Augustine Institute. She lives and works in Lake Charles, Louisiana with her dog, Barney, where they can be found playing fetch in the backyard and posting selfies on Instagram.

TEN TIPS FOR MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE

By: Joe Paprocki, DMin

1. UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE: Good discipline is not an end in itself. The goal of your session is effective learning. One can have good discipline but still have a poor lesson. The role of good discipline is to remove any obstacles from an effective learning experience.

2. IDENTIFY THE IMPROPER BEHAVIOR: Be sure to clearly identify the discipline problems that you need to address. As the old saying goes, choose your battles wisely. Once you have clearly identified the discipline problems that are most troublesome, you can develop a plan for addressing them. When identifying discipline problems, consider the following reasons for the improper behavior:
   - Boredom
   - Immaturity and ego needs (seeking attention, trying to impress peers)
   - Hostility toward either you, other participants, the Church, parents (some hostility can be considered natural for certain age groups)
   - Personality clash (with you or other participants)
   - Emotional problem (family situation, drug related, guilt, inner conflict)
   - The “nature” of religious formation (young people, especially pre-adolescents and early adolescents, don’t want their peers to think that they enjoy religion)

3. DON’T PANIC: When discipline problems arise, strive to remain calm and in control. Communicating a sense of authority while remaining calm is not only effective, but also necessary in developing a long-term strategy for combating discipline problems. Losing your cool may work for the moment, but it undermines your credibility in the long run.

4. DON’T INTERRUPT YOUR LESSON: One of the reasons children and adolescents misbehave is that they know it will interrupt the flow of the lesson, frustrate you, and bring attention to them. A good catechist learns to deal with discipline problems without stopping the lesson. By using eye contact, placing a hand on their desk, or standing next to the “culprit” while you continue to facilitate the lesson, you can minimize the behavior without interrupting the flow of your lesson.

5. KEEP PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED: When participants get bored, they try to create their own stimulation. When you see that a participant’s attention is waverering, involve him or her in the lesson by asking a question or giving a task for him/her to perform. By keeping your participants busy and on task right from the start, you eliminate a great deal of potential trouble.

6. RIDE YOUR EYE, USE NAMES, AND MOVE AROUND: If you are completely stationary as a catechist, you invite participants farthest away from you to engage in misbehavior. Stay on the move, walking around the room as you teach, and keeping your eyes moving around as you speak. If you are answering one participant’s question, move your eyes around the room so that it is clear you are still speaking to everyone. Most importantly, learn and use your participants’ names. One of the most effective ways of getting a participant’s attention is to call his or her name out loud, pause, and direct the question or task to them.

7. CHECK YOUR SEATING ARRANGEMENT: How a room is arranged can have a great impact on behavior. Your seating should be arranged in such a way that no participant feels separated or remote from the hub of activity. If a participant feels they can “hide” from you, they will take advantage of the situation. Make sure visual lines are open. Likewise, if a participant is misbehaving, it could be that he/she is sitting with others who “egg them on.” Moving a participant’s seat can effectively reduce bad behavior.

8. REINFORCE GOOD BEHAVIOR: Don’t just focus on the negative. Learn to focus attention on good behavior and reinforce it. When a group is behaving properly, you can reward them with affirmation. When a participant who is prone to misbehaving shows the proper behavior, be sure to reinforce it with positive affirmation without going overboard.

9. MAKE A FEW RULES, EXPLAIN, AND ENFORCE THEM CONSISTENTLY: When you first begin meeting with your group, it is a good idea to formulate some rules with the help of the participants. Depending upon their age, you should be able to ask them what rules they will need to make the gatherings go well and create a good learning environment. Later, when enforcing the rules, you can remind them that these are their rules. Be sure participants know clearly what the rules are and enforce them in a consistent manner so that they know the rules are to be taken seriously.

10. GET TO KNOW THE AGE-GROUP YOU WORK WITH: Be sure to get to know about the developmental characteristics of the age group you are working with. Some behaviors can be more easily understood and dealt with if you have a working knowledge of the physical, psychological, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual characteristics of the age group. Most catechist manuals include an overview of these developmental characteristics.

Joe Paprocki, DMin, is National Consultant for Faith Formation at Loyola Press. He has more than 30 years of experience in ministry and has taught at many different levels. He is the author of numerous books, including the bestseller The Catechist’s Toolbox and Under the Influence of Jesus.

MARK your CALENDAR

**Chrism Mass**
March 15, 2016, Cathedral, Superior

**Easter Triduum and Easter Sunday**
March 24-27, 2016

**NCEA Convention**
March 29-31, 2016, San Diego CA
Contact: Peggy Schoenfuss, pschoenfuss@catholicdos.org

**Discipleship U – High School Leadership Training**
April 15-17, 2016, Crosswoods, Mason
Contact: Christopher Hurtubise, churtubise@catholicdos.org

**Lay Ministry Enrichment**
April 16, 2016, St. Anthony Parish, Tony
“Moral and Ethical Leadership”
Contact: Chris Newkirk, cnewkirk@catholicdos.org

**Professional Development Days**
April 21, 2016, St. Joseph Parish Center, Hayward
“Healthy Parish Leaders, Leading Healthy Parish Communities”
Contact: Chris Newkirk, cnewkirk@catholicdos.org

**N.E.W. Koinonia**
April 22-24, 2016, St Mary, Tomahawk
October 21-23, 2016, Our Lady of Sorrows, Ladysmith
Contact: Bluette Puchner, onthelake@centurytel.net

**Extreme Faith Camp**
May 15, 2016, Extreme Team Training
June 12 – 17, 2016
Crosswoods, Mason & Crescent Lake, Rhinelander
Contact: Christopher Hurtubise, churtubise@catholicdos.org

**NCCL Convention**
May 22-26, 2016, Jacksonville FL
Contact: Peggy Schoenfuss, pschoenfuss@catholicdos.org

**2016 Totus Tuus Schedule**
June 12 – 17
Cathedral of Christ the King, Superior
June 19 – 24
St. Joseph Parish, Hayward
Nativity of Our Lord, Rhinelander
June 25 - July 1
St. Anthony of Padua, Park Falls
July 10 – 15
Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, Ladysmith
St. Bridget, River Falls
July 17 – 22
St. Joseph Parish, Amery
July 24 – 29
St. John the Baptist, Glenwood City
St. Mary, Tomahawk
July 31 – August 5
St. Francis Xavier Parish, Merrill
St. Francis de Sales, Spooner
August 7-12
St. Patrick Parish, Hudson
Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish, Medford

**Level I Part I Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Training**
August 8-13, Solon Springs
Contact: Jodi Cosgrove, jmcosgrove@yahoo.com

**Fall Conference**
October 28, 2016, St. Joseph, Rice Lake
Contact: Peggy Schoenfuss, pschoenfuss@catholicdos.org

**Catechetical Sunday 2016**
September 18, 2016

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**Congratulations to our New Shepherd**
Bishop James P. Powers
Ordained February 18, 2016

“DEDUC ME, DOMINE, LUCE TUA”
(Lead Me by Your Light)
ANCHORED IN THE LORD - Homilies of Fr. David Neuschwander
http://anchoredinthelord.org/

CATHOLIC INSPIRATIONS - THREE GREAT THINGS - Blog & Homilies by Fr. Andrew Ricci
http://studyprayserve.com/author/paparicci/
http://www.threegreatthings.libsyn.com/

UMD CATHOLIC CAMPUS MINISTRY – Homilies of Fr. Mike Schmitz
http://bulldogcatholic.org/homilies-archive/