



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO INTERNATIONAL CATECHETICAL CONGRESS**

*Friday, 17 October 1997*

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of this International Catechetical Conference, organized to highlight the presentation of the *editio typica* of the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) and the revised edition of the *General Directory for Catechesis*. The number of participants, the timeliness of the themes discussed and the competence of the speakers make the meeting an important event in the Church's life.

I extend my affectionate greetings to the Cardinals, to the Presidents of the Catechetical Commissions of the Episcopal Conferences, to the directors of the National Catechetical Offices, to the priests, religious and committed lay people who have come here from various parts of the world to share the fruits of their experience and training.

I cordially thank each one individually for the valuable service given to the Church. In particular, I express my gratitude to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Archbishop Darío Castrillón Hoyos, who — with the help of their staffs in the Congregations for the [Doctrine of the Faith](#) and for the [Clergy](#) — have organized and conducted this important meeting. It is an eloquent sign of the place the Church assigns to proclaiming the Word of God in a suitable manner to the people of our time. It is by starting with their questions that they must be helped to discover, through human words, the message of salvation brought by Jesus Christ. It is this complex, delicate work that the Church undertakes today, committed to imbuing different cultures with the perennial truth of the Gospel.

2. The motto chosen for this International Catechetical Congress — "*Tradidi vobis quod accepi*" (1 Cor 5:3) — effectively illustrates the nature of the Church's faith and evangelizing mission. In this regard, we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Faith is a personal act — the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself. But faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbour impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 166).

In this task of transmitting the faith, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is offered as a *particularly authoritative instrument*. You have reflected on it during these days in order to become better acquainted with its features and aims. The *Catechism* presents revealed Truth by showing, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, how it is *believed, celebrated, lived* and *prayed* in the Church. Drawing abundantly from the precious patrimony of the past —especially the biblical, liturgical, patristic, conciliar and magisterial patrimony — and drawing from it *what is new and what is old* (cf. Mt 13:52), it expresses the unalterable freshness of the Christian truth *in our society today*. It thus becomes an eloquent witness to the degree of awareness and self-knowledge which the Church possesses, as a whole, regarding her own perennial deposit of truth. As such, the *Catechism* is presented as a *sure norm for the teaching of the faith*, and at the same time as a reliable and authentic reference text for preparing local catechisms.

3. Watchful in hope, the Church, between Easter and the *parousia*, must fulfil her eschatological mandate by proclaiming God's kingdom and harvesting the good grain of the Lord from the whole world. What she must absolutely do before the Lord's return is to proclaim the "Christ event", the paschal mystery of his Death and Resurrection. To be the first and universal sacrament of salvation is her essential task.

The ministry of the Word is thus situated at the very centre of the Church's apostolic action, when she celebrates the Eucharist or sings the praise of God, and when she teaches the faithful how to live their faith in daily life.

Far from remaining neutral, the Church is beside the Christian at the various moments of his life, to guide him in making choices that are consistent with the demands inscribed in the supernatural ontology of his Baptism. It is through this "mystagogical" action that the faith, which blossomed in Baptism, can grow and reach that full maturity which belongs to the responsible adult Christian.

This is precisely the task of catechesis. Not an easy task! Since it must take into consideration every aspect of the person's life — the secular as well as the religious — catechesis must be rooted in the whole context of life. In other words, it must consider not only those to be catechized,

their cultural and religious situation, but also their social, economic and political conditions. The whole of life, in all its concrete aspects, must be read and interpreted in the light of the Gospel.

4. This presupposes an attentive evaluation of the problems encountered today by a believer who rightly desires to make further progress in understanding his faith. These problems include the great questions man asks about his origins, the meaning of life, the happiness for which he longs, the destiny of the human family.

This means that a *twofold movement* will always be necessary to proclaim the Word of God in its integrity and purity to the people of our time, so that it will be intelligible and also attractive to them. The discovery of the integral mystery of salvation presupposes, on the one hand, an encounter with the witness offered by the ecclesial community of a life inspired by the Gospel. Thus catechesis speaks with greater effect about what can be really seen in the community's concrete life. The catechist in a way interprets the Church to those he is catechizing. He reads and teaches them to read the signs of faith, the most important of which is the Church herself.

At the same time, the catechist must be able to discern and make the most of the spiritual inklings already present in man's life, according to the fruitful method of saving dialogue. This is a task which arises again and again: catechesis must be able to grasp the questions arising in the human heart and direct them towards the answers offered by creative and saving Love. Prayerful meditation on Sacred Scripture, faithful study of "God's marvels" throughout salvation history, listening to the Church's living tradition and attention to the history of mankind, all linked together, can help people discover the God who is already working in the depths of their hearts and minds to draw them to himself and fill them with his love, making them his children in the Only-begotten Son.

5. Dear brothers and sisters, may this International Catechetical Congress strengthen the fruitful collaboration of the priestly ministry, of religious life and of the lay apostolate for a renewed proclamation of the Word of salvation, which is the Church's essential mission and the perennial source of her joy in bringing forth new children. With one heart we must all tirelessly attend to this fundamental task which Christ entrusted to his Church: to bring the living Word to the world, to set it free from sin and to make the virtues and capacities of the new life in Christ resplendent in it.

With these wishes, I invoke upon you all an abundance of divine graces and, as a pledge of consolation and comfort, I affectionately impart to you my Blessing.

---

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana