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BISHOP ROBERT A. LLANOS

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2018



*Feature Address to Diocesan Catechetical Gathering*

# ENLISTING WITNESSES FOR CHRIST

*“Catechists are people who keep the memory of God alive; they keep it alive in themselves and they are able to revive it in others”*

*-Pope Francis*

## **Enlisting Witnesses for Christ**

My dear friends I thought that as we gather this weekend to be renewed and reenergized in our ministry as Catechists it would be an opportune time for us to reflect carefully on who we are called to be and the direction we are called to take if we are to be fruitful in this ministry.

As we consider our identity as Catechists i.e. 'who we are called to be' the first word that should come to mind is witness. Witness to what? Witness to the truth! What Truth? To Jesus Christ who is the fullness of Truth. We are called first to witness to the person of Christ from whom follows a fuller knowledge of the Trinitarian Mystery and from whom we gain our salvation. The Greek word for witness is Martyr. "Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ ... to whom he is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian Doctrine". (c.c. # 2473). Like all baptized Christians, Catechists have an obligation to witness by the example of their lives and their words to the Good News of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom here on earth. Catechists too like all Christians have an obligation to act as witnesses of the Gospel and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. What does this all mean for the Catechists. It means that on several different levels the Catechist is called to a martyrdom like Christ since it is about Christ that they witness. In other words the Catechist must give his or her life because one's life is the very teaching in the first instance and the words and doctrines explain what is already being witnessed to in one's life. The integrity of the character of the Catechist to a large extent will determine the effectiveness of their ministry.

On a practical level what might this martyrdom look like? It is an illusion to think that we can live one kind of life and effectively teach another kind to our candidates. Our martyrdom, i.e. the offering of our lives to Christ as Catechists, must take the form of a commitment that is rich in fortitude, self-sacrifice, patience and a willingness to serve no matter what the circumstances. Like Jesus on the cross we must have on our minds only the love of those whom he was saving and witnessing to. Like Jesus too your love and resolve will be often tested. When these times occur you must stand firm in the strength of God and see in these moments opportunities for your love to be purified and strengthened. Take heart, other Catechists elsewhere are on the same journey as yourself. The offering of our lives as Catechist must also mean that we live our love and faith with integrity. We ourselves must live what we teach, and we must teach not our own doctrines but the deposit of faith handed down to us in the Church's Tradition. That means that one of the ways we offer ourselves as witnesses (martyrs) is by learning the faith as best we can and living it ourselves. Even as we teach we must listen and learn in a spirit of humility and desire. We must be a living example of what we teach. Your martyrdom as Catechists includes facing the difficulties of in-disciplined candidates, difficult parents, difficult and unsupporting Parish Priests, shortage of resources, inadequate facilities, and lack of training. With the power of the Holy Spirit in you don't just complain and give up but be creative, innovative and bold in your efforts to hand down the faith in the Church's name and in the name of Jesus the Christ who is its head. My commitment to you at this gathering is to resolve some of the difficulties mentioned above beginning with this workshop gathering 2018. This diocese is much too small in terms of parishes to not have an efficient and effective Catechetical Program everywhere in the diocese. Under my tenure this will change. What the Diocese asks of you is your commitment and your witness.

It must be evident by now that the spiritual character or spirituality of the Catechist is supremely important and essential to the effectiveness and success as a Catechist on mission. When Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom he told them take nothing for the journey, no staff, no haversack, no sandals etc ... Take

only the power and authority he had given them and trust in him alone to be successful. You too have no power to teach effectively and to succeed unless Christ himself empowers you and your ministry as Catechists. Therefore my dear friends it is absolutely necessary for you to have an ever deepening relationship with God. You must know him to share him with others and to witness to him. You must therefore have a life of prayer and attend to the sacraments regularly especially the Eucharist and Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is paramount if you are to succeed in your mission as Catechist and witness. You are at the forefront of the battle for the salvation of souls, you need God's power in you and with you, because your enemy is the devil himself, who will do everything to deter you and prevent you from succeeding. Even more wonderful however is that your Catechetical ministry will become a joy and a loving passion as your spiritual character matures through your attention to prayer and the sacraments.

It should be clear by now that your Catechetical ministry in the Church is a process and your commitment to the process is necessary for you to succeed. Too often in today's world we are only concerned with the outcome, the success and the glory. As you already know things of value take time and effort, perseverance and sacrifice. To the extent you are willing to commit to that kind of process, to that extent the outcome will have real value to the Church and the Kingdom of God. For the process to be successful all of us must display a spirit of openness, charity and goodwill to one another. We must be flexible and disciplined. We must encourage and challenge one another and see this process as an adventure at the end of which we will see the face of Christ in each other as we witness to his Truth. Finally we must be patient with ourselves and others when we make mistakes and experience failures. These are the trials by which we triumph in Christ whose love endures forever and whose mercy is everlasting. I will conclude now with a brief statement on going forward. As Catechists for this Diocese I invite you to dream and to hope and to share what you dream and hope for so that if necessary it may be put into action.

My dream for this Diocese is that together we establish a well trained and experienced group of Catechists working together for the glory of God and his Kingdom. That we develop and implement a Catechetical Program that is second to none and that is relevant to our time and needs. One that looks to the future but holds firm to the teachings of Christ and his Church. I dream of joyful, loving and compassionate and faithfilled Catechists whose lives speak more loudly than their words. I dream of God's Kingdom here in this Diocese.

I expect then that the outcome of this gathering would be some very important steps forward in realizing this dream. Do not let this event be a talkshop or a holiday, but learn well, plan well and when you return to your Parishes implement with great passion what you have planned. Only then you will be a witness for Christ and his Church. I also want to thank each and every one of you for coming forward and offering yourselves for this supremely important ministry in the Church. May God repay you a hundredfold. Let me end now by imparting upon you all and this gathering weekend my Apostolic Blessing as I ask God's infinite blessings and graces upon you now and always.

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