

Catechists with Brother Gabriel

Catechesis is a vital activity for the Church in her evangelising mission, whether it be to propose a first proclamation of the Gospel message or to accompany people in the process of growth and maturing in their Christian life. This is how John Paul II put it: "The Church has always considered catechesis one of her primary tasks, for, before Christ ascended to His Father after His resurrection, He gave the apostles a final command - to make disciples of all nations and to teach them to observe all that He had commanded... Very soon the name of catechesis was given to the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in His name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ. The Church has not ceased to devote her energy to this task" (Catechesi Tradendae, 1).

Brother Gabriel said: "There is no activity more beautiful, more honourable and more meritorious than that of the catechist" (New Guide, 892).

Certainly the ecclesial and social conditions of the time when Brother Gabriel and the first Brothers exercised catechetical activity and those of the Church and society today are very different. Hence the need to situate Brother Gabriel in the environment in which he lived in order to be able to take up today the essence of his message and bring it up to date with the strength and conviction that the Holy Spirit gives us.

It is not a question of doing today what Brother Gabriel did, nor of being catechists as Brother Gabriel was; but, after having known and understood what he lived, to let ourselves be carried by the motivating impulse of his charism in order to live and act in the Church as catechists. Only in this way will it be possible to establish a profound harmony with him and even a strong personal relationship in the communion of saints. This is the only way to be catechists with Brother Gabriel.

Bro. Teodoro Berzal. FSF



**Being a
Catechist
Sa-Fa today**

Being catechists in the 21st century

"On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: 'Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you'" (EG 164).

These words from *Evangelii gaudium* are Pope Francis' delivery to all catechists in this difficult but exciting time in the life of the Church.

I have often wondered how Brother Gabriel would react to these words of the pope, coming to us today. He would surely be surprised, because he would find another world and because catechesis in his time in 19th century France was very different. The catechism had a predominantly doctrinal and moral character: what one needed to know (the Creed), what one needed to receive (the sacraments), what one needed to do (the commandments), what one needed to ask (the prayers). The catechisms were all like that. We were in a time



of social Christianity, where faith was transmitted by osmosis, in the environments of life: the family, the school, the village. In catechism, it was enough to transmit the 'grammar of the faith', but the 'syntax of the faith' was assimilated in these three 'generating wombs'. Today, things have profoundly changed. Gone is social Christianity, we find ourselves immersed in a great biodiversity of races, philosophies, wisdoms, opinions, religions... The country is the global village, the school is based on the value of secularism, in the majority of families the faith is no longer transmitted.

We understand then the invitation of Pope Francis. Today, catechesis is fundamentally a matter of first announcement. Pope St John Paul II used a Latin expression: '*Non omnia, sed totum*'. He meant that today it is not important to say all the contents of the faith (*omnia*), but the whole of the faith, its heart, its central proclamation (*totum*). This central proclamation is the kerygma, God's unconditional love for all, which is free and which precedes our commitment and responsibility. God loves us as we are, we are kept by him, we are not living beings destined for death but mortal beings destined for life, because his love for us is so intense that he no longer allows us to disappear.

Yes, Brother Gabriel would be surprised that catechesis no longer had to be the transmission of so much content, which he cared so much about, but he would be even happier, because that was exactly what he did with the children and families. He used the catechisms of his time, which are

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(EG 164).

outdated today, but with those tools Gabriel did nothing more than convey God's merciful love in words and attitudes. This proclamation is what our contemporaries are willing to hear, indeed long to hear, because we all need salvation today. May Brother Gabriel accompany us to be heralds of God's gratuitous and unconditional mercy today.

Bro. Enzo Biemmi, FSF

Formation experiences

Being a catechist, in addition to a willingness to accompany others in the care of the faith, requires an adequate formation. It is an unavoidable requirement for the catechist, but also for the community in which he or she carries out his or her mission. In the June issue we shared the experience of the schools for catechists run by the Brothers in Burkina Faso. Today we bring you two concrete experiences of the Sa-Fa Family, among others.

The formation of catechists and pastoral workers has always been a concern. Sometimes the Dioceses helped us, but for some years now we have had to carry it out ourselves and implement resources for it. Some time ago in Uruguay there was a meeting of catechists and pastoral workers for formation. Lately we saw the need to systematise this training by offering on-site workshops that deal with various training topics and that aim to strengthen the mission at hand.

Formation Workshops. Uruguay

These awareness-raising workshops last 2 hours and are led by two leaders chosen by the Provincial Executive Council. They are carried out by inviting the nearest schools. The themes we have planned are as follows: The figure of Jesus and the Word. Brother Gabriel: Charism and legacy for all pastoral leaders. What does it mean to be a pastoral agent in a Sa-Fa work? Didactic planning of a meeting. How to deal with the emerging situations of the students and the importance of networking.

It is foreseen that during the year we will go deeper into these topics according to the call and the interests of catechists and pastoral agents.



School for catechists. Spain

Under the motto "Growing up to serve better" we hold the annual School for Catechists in different editions. This year around 140 catechists from Barcelona, Gavà, Burgos and Madrid took part. In other years, catechists from Palma de Mallorca and Finisterre have also participated.

Our school responds to the need of formation of young people and adults in their catechetical task. We are encouraged by the words of Brother Gabriel, "it is a task to learn to teach catechesis, because it is a serious mistake to think that it is an easy thing to do". We are very clear that we are called to fulfil this mission in our environment and in our time.

For this reason, the School for catechists tries to find the fundamentals to carry out this task: reflection on our being Sa-Fa catechists; the importance of the preparation of the group; the use of the Bible; sometimes we offer first aid techniques to avoid unexpected situations; the incorporation of the digital with a reflection on evangelisation in the networks, and finally, the importance of working on interiority, silence and hauling, as a response to our society in which the culture of the immediate is prevailing. We trust that this School will help our catechists to grow and help each of our groups to grow.

Pastoral Team

Why I am a catechist

"Seeing how some Christians live, I felt the call to carry out my mission by helping them to strengthen their faith and bringing them closer to God. I do this through catechesis, but also through liturgical animation and teaching them to know the Bible". (Br. Dyo Nulle - Indonesia)

"To live my baptismal consecration. Because I can bring Christ to everyone and share the Good News. Because I want to share my faith with others. I assume my baptismal gifts of priest and prophet". (Brs. Bosco and Dindo. Philippines)

"Being a catechist has been one of the most beautiful experiences God has given me. The call has been strong and constant, wherever he leads me I will go. I love to see the smiles of each child, I imagine that it is Jesus in that smile, and my heart leaps with joy! Following Jesus is an honour and a great responsibility". (Estefani. Mexico)

"It is a path of hope, charity and teaching, for all those who wish to discover Jesus in their lives; it is an experience of accompaniment that demands commitment, dedication and great love, especially with God's little ones". (Br. Elvis. Venezuela)

"I am a catechist because I understand God's call for me. It is a vocation, to want to transmit the faith and to evangelise, to be there being a bridge, a mediation for the encounter between God and people". (Lucía Carzoglio. Uruguay)

"Serving the Church was the driving force behind my vocation as a catechist since I was a child, to the point that since 1970 I learnt this noble mission from the catechists in my home town. For me, these experiences were a series of trials in my vocational journey as a 'catechist' and then as a 'Religious Brother'". (Br. Epiphane. Burkina Faso)



"Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" (Mt 10, 8)

"Because I believe in the need for every young person or adult to have a point of reference in different contexts: parents, teachers, animators, all are 'guides' who show, each in his own way, how to approach life. Over time, everyone takes an example from these guides and adds their own. Deep down, it is very nice for me to be able to show people younger than me that which I have learned throughout my life". (Turin, Italy)

"I had never asked myself why I am a catechist. I believe that God heard my song 'Take me where people need your Word...'. And here I go, carrying his Word, happy to be called to this task". (María José. Tandil, Argentina)

"I am a catechist by vocation. Because it is God who has chosen me to be his witness in the proclamation of the Good News". (Guillaume Zoungrana, Burkina Faso)

"Being a catechist comes from different experiences of sharing my life with children. It gives me great joy, it constantly gives me very deep and valuable lessons for my life of faith. They give me a lot of light to live this path". (Marta Caballero. Uruguay)

"I am a catechist because I feel called to accompany children in their search for God and to be able to witness their encounter with God and how they make Him the centre of their lives. It is a very beautiful and comforting experience to be able to live their faith experience with them. It is also a way of giving back what they did for us when we were younger". (Madrid. Spain)

"Because I want to grow in my own faith. Because the children, young people and adults of today's world need more than ever to hear the Good News of Jesus". (Br. Patrisius Joan. Indonesia)

"To be a catechist is to enter into the world of children and to accompany them on their journey, sharing our love for God and for our fellow human beings". (Carmen Villaseñor, Mexico)

"My vocation as a catechist was born through the example of one of my catechists. I left my village in search of money. I heard the voice of the Lord: 'Leave the money and seek God'. So I went to a training centre for catechists. There is no lack of difficulties, but I am very happy to have made the decision to serve God and my brothers and sisters". (Vincent IMA, Burkina Faso).

"Called to walk together in a participatory style"