

**World Youth Day Catechesis**  
**Theme Three: “Witnesses to Christ in the World”**

*Scripture Text: “Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith” (Col. 2:7)*

I. **Introduction:**

- a. **Thanks** for attending this last catechetical session here at WYD, Madrid, as we prepare to meet the Holy Father tomorrow evening in Vigil and Sunday Morning with the Celebration of Mass
  - 1. Once again, we pause on our pilgrimage to ask the Lord’s blessings upon us and to conclude our reflection of faith

II. Over the last three mornings, at the invitation of Pope Benedict, we have had the opportunity to accept a **threefold grace**:

i. **On Thursday, we explored the gift of faith**

Faith is a divine gift that allows us to enter into a personal, living relationship with Jesus...that allows us not simply to know about Jesus but to know Him intimately and personally.

ii. Yesterday, we had the privilege to answer the same question Jesus posed to his disciples in the Gospel: **Who do you say that I am?**

- 1. Jesus lies at the foundation of our faith and our lives
  - a. **He is our Lord, Redeemer and Friend**

iii. **Today, we will be challenged by Jesus to go forth in mission:**

- 1. To preach “*Good News*” to all the world as “witnesses” to Jesus

III. In order to begin our reflection together, allow me to tell you a story that I read many years ago.

- a. It is a story of a **Christian preacher in the heart of Texas who challenged his people to live what they believe**
  - i. **At that time, there was a terrible drought** in that region of Texas, somewhat similar to what many are now suffering in that same great state.
    - 1. Each Sunday, the preacher asked his people to pray for Rain
      - a. And they did pray, each Sunday at Service, with great conviction and fervor
      - b. Result: No rain
    - 2. As things got desperate, the preacher decided that it was time to **storm heaven with prayers**
      - a. They began one Sunday in Church with services and then moved into a great field for a day full:

1. Singing
  2. Petitions
  3. Prayer
- b. Result: No Rain
3. Amidst all the frustration, disappointment and even a bit of anger, the preacher turned to his congregation and asked:
    - a. **Do you know why it did not rain?**
      - i. Answer: **It is your fault!**
  4. Congregation was **astonished, speechless**
    - a. Matriarch of the Congregation:
      - i. Preacher: you are being unfair
        1. We have been praying for months,
          - a. How is it our fault?
      - b. Answer came swiftly and without hesitation:
        - i. **“Look at you, if you really believed, why did not one of you bring an umbrella!”**
- b. **While there are many reasons why God did not answer their prayers as they desired, the preacher’s point is extremely important:**
- i. If we have faith in Jesus, then it will make a difference in our lives
    1. We will act based on what we believe
      - a. Speak
      - b. Act
      - c. See the world differently
  - ii. His Point: All who believe in Jesus are called to be = WITNESSES
    1. Witness = someone whose faith is put into action every moment of our lives
      - a. **FAITH is not just left in the head or the heart but also moves our hands, our feet, our entire lives**
    2. **A witness is someone who lives life differently because of his/her faith in Christ....**
  - iii. This has been the great call to all who follow Christ from the beginning of the Church:
    1. From Saint Paul, who was literally knocked off his horse, to leave his persecution of the Church to walk with the Lord as his Apostle to the Gentiles
    2. From the apostles, who gave their lives in witness to their Lord
    3. From the earliest generations of Christians, who willingly gave up their wealth, status, family and ultimately their lives to live their faith in a pagan, cruel and violent Empire

4. To our own age, where in the darkness of a prison cell in a Nazi concentration camp, a priest gave his life willingly for a Jewish man, St. Maximilian Kolbe, and sang during the night before his death, in joyful anticipation of seeing His Lord,
5. So also to us is given a **great mission – to be witnesses to the Love and Power of Christ** in our own lives, each moment of every day.

#### IV. So what is to be a witness to Jesus?

a. While this question can be answered in many different ways:

i. I prefer a simple definition:

1. **A Witness = “to manifest our faith in Jesus in word and action”**

a. Unlike when we use the phrase “bear witness” in a courtroom to mean verbal testimony, to bear witness to Jesus means more than just words:

2. *Words:* **Saint John Chrysostom and the cows**

3. *Actions:* **Saint Francis of Assisi:**

**“Use words if necessary”**

4. *Integrity:* **Saint Ignatius of Antioch**

5. *Against opposition:* **The pilgrims here at WYD who answered the taunts and threats of violence from protestors with songs and prayer**

b. **Since faith establishes a personal relationship with Jesus, then to bear witness to him is not simply to convey knowledge about Jesus but to help them to meet Him as a real person**

i. **Important Distinction we can never forget: Knowing *about* Jesus versus Knowing *Jesus***

1. **“Knowing about Jesus”**

a. From our parents, our teachers and parish priests, we have learned who Jesus is, through classes, study and prayer

i. This is most important and the start of our journey of faith

b. **However, many people know a lot about Jesus and do not believe in Him**

i. **We cannot simply know about Jesus**

1. Even the Devil can quote Scripture!

2. **“Knowing Jesus” is something totally different**

- a. We can call this “a divine friendship” which we must establish with Jesus at the very depth of our hearts, minds and spirit.
  - b. **When we come not simply to know about Jesus but to know Jesus, then we will be changed forever!**
  - c. This change, this transformation = **conversion** or **metanoia**
    - 1. **Met-noia:** “To turn away our face/mind”
      - a. Reality of sin
      - b. Inability to heal ourselves
    - 2. In metanoia, we discover the gracious and generous love of God
- ii. **Our Witness is to help the world NOT SIMPLY KNOW ABOUT JESUS but to KNOW HIM**
- c. **So I ask you, will there ever be a time when we will not witness to Jesus? NO**
- i. Is there ever a **moment** when we are not evangelizing? NO
  - ii. Is there ever a **place** where we are not evangelizing? NO
  - iii. Is there ever a **person** to whom we do not evangelize? NO
- d. **Now Pope John Paul and Pope Benedict speak of Christian Witness in terms of a “New Evangelization”: A new preaching of the Gospel**
- i. What can be new of something that has existed from the apostles?
  - ii. **I believe with all my heart that YOUR CONTRIBUTION is what is truly New!**
    - 1. **New spirit**
      - a. John Paul II challenged us to remember that the Church’s mission is to live in such a way that shines out to others (Redemptoris Mission, 26):
    - 2. **New energy**
      - a. Revolution in Egypt
        - i. Pope is calling for a Revolution of Love...
      - b. “Faith is strengthened when it is given to others.” (RM,
    - 3. **New methods**
      - a. Internet
        - i. Where is Jesus in Cyberspace?
          - 1. You are the ones to bring Him there
    - 4. **New audience**
  - iii. **To SUM UP: Your Contribution and Mine:**
    - 1. **Is to bear witness to JESUS, one person at a time**

- a. Talk is Cheap...it is Time for Action
- iv. AND WHEN WE REACH OUT TO THOSE AROUND US, ONE PERSON AT A TIME, we are going to tell them about **THE GOOD NEWS** that we have heard in Jesus

**1. What is the GOOD NEWS ?**

- a. Life is worth living because God took a human life in Jesus
- b. Life is blessed because of Jesus' death and resurrection
  - i. Not just this life but eternal life
- c. Everyone can share in this blessing if they say yes to the Spirit's power to transform them
  - i. The **Spirit is the one who can give** these blessings to you and me

**2. GOOD NEWS DOES NOT END THERE:** All the saints before us have learned the same lesson:

**a. As Father Robert Barron says so beautifully in his teachings, we will bear witness to the fact that MY LIFE IS NOT ABOUT ME.**

- i. Jesus: "He who loses his life will save it; he who clings to his life will lose it"
  - 1. If the Spirit is DIVINE LOVE, then my life is all about love...giving myself away to others

**b. For the world, this idea is crazy:**

- i. The most important word in the English language is "ME":
  - 1. And as long as I have what I need, that is all that matters
- ii. **The world will tempt you:**
  - 1. It is a doggy-dog world: and if you have to lie, cheat or step on the next person, that is OK
  - 2. What about the poor, sick, elderly, unemployed?
    - a. Tough Luck to them...you worry about #One = you.

**c. COMMUNITY/FAMILY we form is **as important** as you and I as persons**

- i. Today, here in Madrid: we say that the most important word is "us" in Christ
- ii. It is **about "us"** in Christ

V. **It is not easy to bear witness to Jesus: Three Important Lessons to help keep us on track:**

- a. **First Lesson:** Grandma used to say: “You cannot give what you do not have”
  - i. **Variation:** “You cannot share who you do not know”!
    1. **Your Personal relationship with the Lord Jesus is the most important relationship you will ever have**
      - a. **Nurture this relationship first and foremost by prayer**
  - ii. I am often asked: How can I pray?
    1. **Prayer: is Communication** with God (at its most basic)
      - a. **Makes Sense:** To spend time with the God whom we love
        - i. As communication, it is a **two way street**
          1. Speaking is as important as listening
          2. Listening is an art that needs to be learned
      2. **Prayer is both Personal and Communal**
        - a. Personal: Challenge is to make the time
        - b. Communal: Challenge is to discern the need
          - i. Why do I have to go to Church to pray?
            1. One great gift comes only when we are together: **EUCHARIST**
      3. **Eucharist: GREATEST SACRAMENT OF JESUS’ LOVE**
        - a. **Jesus come to us in His Body and Blood, soul and divinity**
          - i. His Body broken for us...His Blood poured out for us
        - b. When we receive this great sacrament of Love, **we are changed:**
          - i. Acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness (Penitential Rite)
          - ii. The desire to know Him more deeply: (Liturgy of the Word)
          - iii. Unites us together as a family of faith around one altar (Sacrifice)
          - iv. The burning desire to bring others to Jesus
  - iii. **RESULT: Through prayer, we can gradually grow in Holiness:**
    1. **Meaning of Holiness:**
      - a. **Catechism’s understanding:**
        - i. Model of all holiness is the Lord Jesus

- ii. Perfection of charity is holiness of life (CCC, 1709)

**b. Holiness = (wholeness) Right Relationship with**

- i. God
- ii. My neighbor
- iii. Myself

b. **Second Lesson: “Witness is all about Ordinary Life”**

i. **Manifest that faith to others through the actions of my personal life:**

1. Story of Elijah

- a. God came in the breeze: **In the ordinary!**

ii. **Manifest that faith to others through the actions of my community:**

1. Grandma also use to say: **Show me your friends and I will tell you the type of person that you are:**

a. **And so I ask you:**

i. **Are your friends**

1. **Christ-centered?**

2. **Prayerful?**

3. **Welcoming?**

4. **Generous?**

5. **Just?**

b. **If they are, you are blessed**

i. **If not, it is time for new friends**

c. **Third Lesson: To bear witness to Christ demands sacrifice, even suffering**

i. **It is easy to get discouraged in our world...seem to be more problems than solutions**

1. **Temptation:** is to turn away and give up even trying to change things

- a. My suspicion is that we have all been tempted to do just that

ii. **Truth: Change is possible but never easy**

- 1. We have to keep our eyes fixed on the goal that we wish to achieve and be prepared to struggle and sacrifice for what we believe in

iii. **The theme of our time together, Col. 2:7 was written by Saint Paul while he was in prison**

- 1. **On the surface, he had every reason to give up**

- a. **But he did not....because He knew that Jesus would never abandon him**
- b. **He wrote the letter to assure the Colossians in their faith!**
- c. **Why?**
  - i. **His believed that his victory was assured**
  - ii. **And so is yours and mine in Christ!**

## VI. **Conclusion**

- a. I do not know whether it rained in that small town in Texas...
  - i. But I have every confidence that there was a run on selling umbrellas
    - 1. Because believing in Jesus should make a real difference in your life and mine
  - ii. As we end our catechesis, let us remember the words of Saint Paul to Timothy (2Tim. 2:11):
    - 1. “If we have died with Him, we shall also reign with him, and if we endure, we shall also reign with Him.”
      - a. It is time for some reigning!