

■ Now continue the reflection...

The Longing of the Soul

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
 My soul thirsts for you;
 My flesh faints for you,
 as in a dry and weary land where
 there is no water.
 (Psalm 63)

While we certainly do experience moments of deep and profound happiness, we quickly realize that the satisfaction they bring is only temporary. Before we know it, we've moved on to the next dream, ever hoping that the next horizon will make us happy. We hunger for love, for intimacy, for belonging, for accomplishment, for peace, for justice, for the happiness of our children, for our first home, for a life-companion, for health, for wealth, and for security. While each of these may offer us temporary happiness, the satisfaction is always short-lived. We still hunger for something more.



Pause to reflect on your hunger. Ask yourself: How do I try to satisfy the longings of my soul? Where do I seek happiness? What do I seek that really doesn't satisfy my hunger?

Notes

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Why do you think God loves the birds so well?

Often our answer reveals the areas of our life where we separate ourselves from God and where sin enters our lives. No one likes being hungry. Aching and in our hurry, we often look for satisfaction in things that ultimately are not good for us, and maybe even hurt us or the ones we love. Sometimes we turn to unhealthy relationships, addictive chemicals, food, sex, alcohol, or work because we are frantic to do something about this ache that exists at the core of our being. We hate it. It's not a comfortable feeling, and so we often run from it.

What St. Ignatius suggests at the beginning of his *Spiritual Exercises* is that we need to allow ourselves time to be with our hunger. Rather than running from it and trying not to feel it, we are invited to stay with our hunger and learn from it.



In God's Image

If we really believe that we are created in the image and likeness of God, we know that one of our most profound realities is that we hunger for fulfillment. Why? Is it because we long to return to the source of the superabundant love that created us? That nothing created ever totally satisfies our hunger? The entire story of salvation is about the unreserved love of God that constantly draws us into the intimacy and companionship for which we were created.



Who is your
faith journey companion?

The ache that you and I experience deep in our souls was created by the One in whose image we are made. We are meant for God and God is meant for us. While we look for many ways to satisfy the hunger of our hearts, ultimately we will only find satisfaction in the heart of God. As St. Augustine tells us: "Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in you."



Pause here and ask yourself: What thought or idea expressed in this reflection really stirs me? How would I repeat it in my own words? Take a few moments to collect and savor this reflection. Write down your thoughts.

Notes

A large vertical area with horizontal yellow lines for writing notes.



Called to Give Myself

But if I am so needy myself, how can God possibly be suggesting that I offer guidance to other people on their journey of faith? If I am so hungry myself, how can I, as a catechist or teacher, help feed others? How dare I, weak and still on my own journey, attempt to lead others to Christ?

Yet we believe this is exactly what God is suggesting. Perhaps it's not so much about what we have to give—how much knowledge, spiritual wisdom, or profound faith—but about letting God use us as instruments. When we read the story in the Old Testament where God calls out to Isaiah in the night and bids him to go speak as a prophet to the people, Jeremiah can't believe it. "Me? You can't mean me. I don't have the words or the faith to speak such great things, Lord." And God tells him not to be afraid. "I will give you the words to speak."

Perhaps those to whom we are sent as catechists and teachers are not so much seeking answers as looking for a pilgrim companion, someone who is willing to walk alongside them on the journey of faith. No one else is able to provide the answer their hearts seek. But what you can offer is companionship in faith, willingness to journey with them, asking the questions of life, searching out the answers together, walking the path of death and resurrection with them as spiritual friends.

Faith-Filled Living

Perhaps the most helpful thing we can offer each other on this journey of faith is a willingness to let others know the hunger of our own hearts, to know our hopes and dreams, and to see how we try to live them out. By offering others a glimpse into our own journey of faith, we give the best guidance possible. When we teach from our weakness, without the arrogance of thinking we have the right answers, we offer the greatest gift. By this we make ourselves secondary to the movement of God's Spirit.



Our goal is not to get
in the way of grace, but
to open the door for grace.

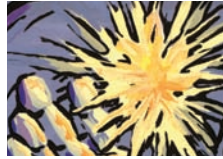
The words that we use to teach are only symbols of what resides inside of us. They are meaningless if our lives—the way we live our faith—do not show what we speak. St. Ignatius proposes that love shows itself more perfectly in deeds than in words.

*Love manifests itself in the mutual sharing
Of what we have,
And who we are,
With those we love.*

*Love shows itself more perfectly in deeds
than in words.¹*

So, too, our faith-filled living speaks more loudly than any words we might speak about God or faith. Our words become meaningless if our lives do not live out the faith of which we speak. The greatest gift we can offer those who God gives us to guide is allowing them to see faith alive in us. This is what will make us great catechists and teachers. This is what God calls us to. At the end of life, having completed this mission with grace and faith will be what matters most.

¹ Author's paraphrase of #230–231 of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A New Translation* by Louis Puhl, SJ, The Newman Press.



The Time of Prayer

■ Ignatius ends each of his exercises with a “colloquy,” a heartfelt prayer, in one’s own words, in the presence of God. It should be like a friend talking to a friend. Begin with the words below, and then continue to talk to God however your heart moves you. Stay with the prayer as long as it seems right to do so.

■ If you’d like to make notes to help you recall your time of prayer, you may do so in the space provided here.



Ever faithful God,
 open the doors of my heart.
 Help me, O Lord,
 to recognize the hunger you created in me,
 to be aware of the deepest desires of my heart,
 to know that I will find you in the midst of my longing.
 Deepen my faith, dear God,
 that I might walk in faith beside those you have entrusted to my care.

When you are ready, end by praying the Our Father.

The Growing Faith Project booklet for this session is #1.

1 The inborn hunger for God

Content summary of booklet #1

- We are religious beings by nature.
- We are made to live in communion with God.
- Being with God is the only way to find happiness.
- When we listen to the message of creation and to the voice of conscience, we can arrive at certainty about the existence of God.

This booklet makes reference to articles 26–49 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Excerpt from booklet #1

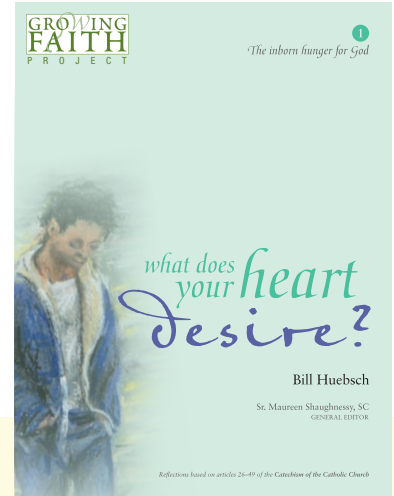
The inborn hunger

The human heart is filled with hunger.
No matter who we are or where we live,
no matter how rich or poor we've become,
no matter to whom we're married,
or not married at all,
no matter what,
we hunger.

And for what is it that we humans hunger?
When we pause to consider this,
in all its magnitude and power,
we realize that we hunger for that One who made us.
We hunger for the divine heart.
We hunger for God.

This desire for God is written into our very hearts,
because we are created by God and for God
and God never ceases to draw us to God's own self.
Only in God will we ever find the truth and happiness
for which we never stop searching.

And even though we have
searched continually for God
down through the centuries
and even in our present day,
God, it turns out, is really quite near to us.
For in God, as Acts of the Apostles reminds us
in chapter 17, verse 28,
“we live and move and have our being.”



Only in God
will we ever find...
happiness.



The Call to Be a Catechist or Teacher

Goal, Objectives, and Skill

The goal of *The Call to Be a Catechist or Teacher* is to help deepen your understanding of your calling, which means knowing and following Christ and leading others to him.

Your objectives are

- to better understand the nature of catechesis;
- to emphasize and teach that discipleship is the outcome you seek in catechesis;
- to take the catechumenate as a model for fuller initiation into the life of Christ and the Church.

Skill

- Sacrifice yourself as a catechist or teacher, working selflessly for your learners.

Preparation

- **Step One:** Experience the *Spiritual Exercises* for this session, and write reflections about your experience.
- **Step Two:** Read booklet #1 *What Does Your Heart Desire?* of the *Growing Faith Project* and do the reflections and exercises, recording your reflections.
- **Step Three:** Read the *Tools for Teaching* section carefully. It is important to articulate your reflections and applications in writing or verbally, whether alone or working as part of a group. If you are studying with a group, you will also enjoy the opportunity to share your experiences in learning sessions.

Step One: Setting the Tone

This optional section introduces you to a discussion of catechesis. Read the story on your own.

To Know Christ

A dialogue between a recent convert to Christ and an unbelieving friend developed like this.

“So you have been converted to Christ? Then you must know a great deal about him. Tell me, what country was he born in? How old was he when he died?”

“I don’t know.”

“How many sermons did he preach?”

“I don’t know.”

“You certainly know very little for a man who claims to be converted to Christ.”

“You are right. But this much I do know. Three years ago I was a drunkard. I was in debt. My family was falling to pieces. But now I have given up drinking and am out of debt. Ours is a happy home. All this and more Christ has done for me. This much I know of Christ!”

To really know means to be transformed by what or whom one knows.



The Christian faith is, above all,
conversion to Jesus Christ.

GDC 53



Step Three: What Is Catechesis?

This session helps you reflect on the nature of catechesis. Read this on your own. If you take part in the group sessions, share your reflections with your group.

When the first disciples began to share the Good News, they proclaimed their experience of the person of Jesus Christ, living, healing, saving, teaching. Jesus revealed to each one the very life of God and God's plan for his people. Jesus didn't come just to tell us about God. He came to show us God, to put us in touch with God in his own person. That's the reality of the incarnation: that God walked with us, spoke with us, ate with us, dreamed with us in the person of Jesus. This loving plan of salvation revealed in the person of Jesus and handed on to the Church is the very heart of catechesis.

All catechesis includes much more than instruction (GDC 104). It is about a guided encounter with the *entire Christian life*, a journey toward ongoing conversion to Christ (GDC 105). As important as good content is, catechesis involves a lot more than content. Catechesis brings content to bear on our lives such that we celebrate our faith in prayer with the community of believers, such that our entire lives are converted to lifelong growing into discipleship of Christ, and such that we learn to share this conviction with all those who turn to us as we share faith with them. We are called to acquire the attitudes of Jesus, attitudes found in the gospels. We are to incarnate our faith daily, to become "living editions of the gospel" for our learners. All of this is nothing less than a gift of the Holy Spirit.

ON YOUR OWN

■ When did you first feel the call to be a catechist or teacher? Who or what was instrumental in helping you realize and follow that call?

Saints are people who let
the light shine through.

In this journey we are not alone. Just as the Church sends teachers and catechists forth for this ministry, so the Church is the setting for our ministry. Catechesis is a key element of the Church's pastoral activity. The word you live and proclaim, the sacraments you celebrate and teach belong to the life of the Church, the body of Christ of which you are a member.



Integrating What You Have Just Learned

■ Discuss with others in your group what catechesis means to you—not theoretically but practically. Reflect on your own experiences. Write down your reflections and ideas.

Notes



Step Five: The Catechumenate as Inspiration for Catechetical Ministry

The baptismal catechumenate provides inspiration for lifelong catechesis. Read this on your own. If you take part in the group sessions, share your reflections with your group.

We need patience with everyone
but first of all with ourselves.

St. Francis de Sales

The process of the catechumenate is a model for the initiation and ongoing faith formation of those being catechized in the life of Christ and of the Church. The baptismal catechumenate involves a journey. This journey involves passing through steps in which the catechumen first accepts the gospel and is signed with the cross, is buried, and ultimately rises to new life with Christ in the sacraments of initiation. Similarly, catechesis is for catechists, teachers, and learners a journey with Christ through his paschal mystery, ritually experienced in the celebration of the liturgy.

The word catechesis
has its roots
in the Greek word *katecheo*,
which means to resound or echo.

The catechumenate includes several rites and rituals, such as the signing with the cross, blessings, anointing, the Scrutinies, the presentations of the Creed and the Our Father. Catechumens break open the Word through a deep faith sharing that flows from their daily lives. Like the catechumenate, lifelong catechesis enables you and your learner to experience the Church's rites and symbols and unfolds their meaning. It provides ever deeper insight into the Scriptures and the faith of the Church through reflection, instruction, and formation. It draws you and your learners more deeply into the life of the faith community, especially in the Sunday Assembly. One of the vital aspects of liturgy is service, so ongoing catechesis encourages and motivates persons of all ages to acts of loving service to others, meeting the needs of the faith community as well as the larger community of the neighborhood, the country, and the world.



Catechesis aims to bring about
in the believer
an ever more mature faith
in Jesus Christ,
a deeper knowledge and love
of his person and message,
and a firm commitment
to follow him.

NDC 19A

Strategies for Making the Catechumenate Your Own Model

- Whatever season of the year you are in at this moment, try to enter more deeply into the spirit of that season: through reading and sharing of the Sunday readings; through traditional seasonal practices (if applicable); by observing the major feasts and solemnities of the season.
- Listen carefully to the homily at Sunday Mass and apply it to your own life.
- Use the Morning and Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours (there are simplified versions for those unable to pray the complete hours).
- Choose specific acts of service to carry out.
- Make an effort to know the other catechists or teachers on your team better. This will help build community and communion.

As You End This Session

During the coming week remember that you are called to be a “living edition of the gospel,” and look for one or two ways you can put this into practice.



Integrating What You Have Just Learned

- Share with other members of your group your efforts in making the catechumenate your model in your own lifelong catechesis. If you are studying on your own, reflect on your own experiences. Afterward write about your difficulties and successes.

Notes

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ON YOUR OWN

■ Choose one of the signs, gestures, or rituals used at Mass (for example, the breaking of the bread, the sign of the cross, the sharing of communion). Then reflect on what it means to you.