

Called to Witness and Proclaim

A PASTORAL LETTER ON EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS IN THE FAMILY

EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR EVANGELIZATION AND CATECHESIS
CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS



Introduction

Dear families,

In the Gospel of Mark, we hear the story of an ordinary family, the family of Jairus, caught up in an extraordinary situation. Jesus encounters this family, listens to them, walks with them, enters into their reality, and calls them to a life transformed and brimming with hope.

... A great crowd gathered round Jesus; and he was by the lake.

Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly,

"My little daughter is at the point of death.

Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live."

So he went with him. ...

While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say,

"Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?"

But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue,

"Do not fear, only believe."

He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly.

When he had entered, he said to them,

"Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."

And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was.

He took her by the hand and said to her, "*Talitha cum*", which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement.

He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

(Mark 5:21-24, 35-43)



The encounter of Jesus with the family of Jairus speaks directly to the experience of families today. Jairus has a dearly loved daughter who has taken ill. Her life hangs in the balance. Moved by love for his daughter and hope that Jesus can make her well, Jairus leaves his daughter at home to be cared for by her mother and members of the community and goes to find Jesus. When Jairus sees Jesus, he begs him, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.” A life-changing encounter with Jesus then transforms the family of Jairus into hope-filled missionary disciples.

Today, like Jesus, the Church wishes to enter into the experience of families, to walk with families, and to partner with families to proclaim the Good News that centres on and radiates from the Gospel. The heart of the Good News is that:

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.

(Evangeliu Gaudium, no. 164)

Catechesis in the Family

Families, which we often call the domestic Church,¹ are schools of love. In families, adults and young people first learn to give and receive love, to live in community, to grow in wisdom and knowledge, to forgive and settle differences, and to express compassion. Families are made up of more than one generation. Catechesis, or the way we share or echo the faith from one generation to another, is also intergenerational. Pope Saint Paul VI wrote, “The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them.”²

The encounter between Jesus and the family of Jairus happens “on the way” – on the way from one town to another. Catechesis in the family is much like this. It often takes place in the car, on the way from one place to another, from one activity to another. It happens as we respond to the real situations of everyday life. It happens



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when family members pause in the midst of a busy schedule to reflect on the events of daily life in the light of faith: to enlighten, to clarify, to praise, to pray, to give thanks to God or to be silent for a moment.

Families today face many challenges, just as the family of Jairus did. The ways that we respond to these challenges are often imperfect. Still, the family is “a proclamation of faith in that it is the natural place in which faith can be lived in a simple and spontaneous manner.”³ That proclamation of faith, which families share primarily by witness, is called the *Kerygma*. Pope Francis beautifully describes the threefold heart of the *Kerygma* in his letter *The Joy of the Gospel*:

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.

(Evangelii Gaudium, no. 164)

Families echo and reveal the love of Jesus Christ in the way they give and receive love. Families echo and reveal the love of Jesus Christ when they lay down their lives for one another in and through the daily sacrifices, or self-giving, of parents denying themselves for their children⁴ and of children being generous to their siblings. Families walk with each other in good times and in hard times, in sickness and in health. From the beginning, when a

man and woman express their love and commitment in their marriage vows, families become schools of love, bearing witness to the Gospel in daily life.

Catechesis with the Family

In the Gospel story of Jesus’ encounter with Jairus and his family, it is clear that Jesus is the Good News for this family. He responds to the father’s request, made out of love for his daughter. He accompanies Jairus to his home. He literally meets the family where they are: in their grief, fear and pain. Moved with compassion, Jesus heals the daughter and restores life. The family of Jairus was transformed by hope through their encounter with Jesus. Because of this encounter, the entire community is transformed by hope. Those who had gathered to mourn went away rejoicing and bearing witness to the wonders God had done.

Jesus walked with the family of Jairus on their journey from sickness to health, from despair to hope, from death to life. The Church wishes



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to walk this same journey with families today, accompanying, supporting and guiding them in various ways. When families gather with the parish community for Sunday Mass, the homily is a significant moment of encounter that helps families place the Word of God in dialogue with the events of daily life. The celebrations of Sacraments and feasts of the liturgical year also provide opportunities for catechesis for families and groups of families. Parish-based catechetical programs and events aim to deepen knowledge and enlighten experience by drawing on the rich storehouse of our Tradition. This storehouse includes “frequent recourse to prayer and the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation,”⁵ Scripture, the witness of the Holy Family and the lives of the saints, doctrine and the story of God’s ongoing intervention in history.

“In and among families, the Gospel message should always resound; the core of that message, the *kerygma*, is what is most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. This message has to occupy the center of all evangelizing activity”⁶:

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.

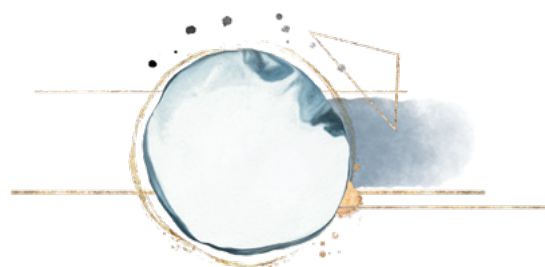
(Evangelii Gaudium, no. 164)



Photo: FG Trade/iStock.com

Catechesis of the Family

At the conclusion of the biblical narrative that tells of the transformative encounter between Jesus and the family of Jairus, the daughter is healed and given new life and hope. This family is transformed into a living witness to the power of life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. They become missionary disciples for their community. They transform the community through their witness of love, resilience, mercy and reconciliation. They transform the community through the story that they tell and retell. We see this dynamic all around us today but often fail to recognize it as the evangelizing and catechizing activity of the family in the midst of the wider community.



A life-changing encounter with Jesus transformed the family of Jairus into missionary disciples. Having been transformed themselves, they begin to transform the world. Today, the family shares the mission of the Church: to go out into all the spheres in which the members live and move and have influence and to “make disciples” – missionary disciples – who are formed and equipped to listen to the Lord, heed his voice and transform the world by love. As sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, friends and neighbours, the family acts as leaven, enriching and enlivening the world.⁷

This missionary discipleship of the family of Jairus has a ripple effect that continues to animate and enliven the Christian community and the entire world, right down to our own

age. Then, as now, the family shares the mission given by Jesus to the entire Church by building up the Christian community and bearing witness to the Gospel in society.⁸ The family proclaims, by witness and word, the life-changing, world-changing message that,

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.

(Evangelii Gaudium, no. 164)



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Conclusion

We, the members of the Episcopal Commission for Evangelization and Catechesis, hope that this pastoral letter gives you and your family support and encouragement. In it we have endeavoured to look with fresh eyes at the life-changing encounter of Jesus with the family of Jairus, seeing in it a model of catechesis in the family, with the family and of the family. Know that your bishops walk with you and stand beside you, praying for you as Saint Paul prayed in his letter to the Ephesians:

... I bow my knees before the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.
I pray that, according to the riches of his glory,
he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being
with power through his Spirit,
and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,
as you are being rooted and grounded in love.
I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints,
what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,
so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

(Ephesians 3.14-19)

Endnotes

- 1 [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), no. 2204.
- 2 [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), no. 71.
- 3 [Directory for Catechesis](#), no. 227.
- 4 [Patris Corde](#), no. 7.
- 5 [Familiaris Consortio](#), no. 33.
- 6 [Directory for Catechesis](#), no. 230.
- 7 [Directory for Catechesis](#), no. 58.
- 8 [Apostolicam Actuositatem](#), no. 2.



Episcopal Commission for Evangelization and Catechesis

*Issued with the approval of the Permanent Council of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
26 July 2024, Feast of Saint Anne and Saint Joachim, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary*



Canadian Conference of
Catholic Bishops

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Detail of “Christ Resurrects the Daughter of Jairus” by Johan Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869), pen with black ink over pencil, watercolour, 30.7 x 37.7 cm, 1815, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

Detail of “Holy Family” by Claudio Coello (1642-1693), oil on canvas, 248 x 169 cm, second half of 17th century, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

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