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## Message of the Holy Father to participants in the First International Catechetical Symposium (Buenos Aires, 11-14 July 2017)

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the *First International Catechetical Symposium*, taking place from 11 to 14 July 2017 in Buenos Aires at the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina (UCA), organized by the Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and the Biblical Apostolate:

### Message of the Holy Father

To His Excellency Archbishop Ramón Alfredo Dus of Resistencia  
President of the Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and the Biblical Apostolate

Dear Brother,

I cordially greet you and all those who will be participating in the various formation meetings organized by the Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and the Biblical Apostolate.

In response to one of his followers who repeatedly asked that he teach him how to preach, Saint Francis answered in the following way: “Brother [when we visit the sick, help children and feed the poor] we are already preaching”. The vocation and task of catechists are encompassed in this beautiful lesson.

Firstly, catechesis is not a “job” or a task that is external to the person who is a catechist; because one “is” a catechist and all of life revolves around this mission. In fact, “being” a catechist is *a vocation of service to the Church*; what was received as a gift from the Lord should be transmitted in one’s turn. Thus, catechists must constantly return to that first announcement of “kerygma” which is the gift that changed their life. It is the fundamental proclamation that must continuously resound in the life of Christians, even more so in those who are called to proclaim and teach the faith. “Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 165). This proclamation should accompany faith which is

already present in the piety of our people. It is necessary to assume all the potential of piety and love that popular religiosity contains, so that not only are the contents of the faith transmitted, but a true school of formation is also established, in which the gift of faith received is nurtured so that actions and words reflect the grace of being the disciples of Jesus.

The Catechist *walks from and with Christ*. They are not persons who set out with their own ideas and tastes, but rather who let themselves be looked at by him, by that gaze that makes the heart burn. The more Jesus occupies the centre of our lives, the more he allows us to come out of ourselves; he de-centres us and he brings us closer to others. This dynamic of love is like the movement of the heart: “systole and diastole”; they concentrate to encounter the Lord and immediately open up, coming out of themselves for love, to bear witness to Jesus and speak of Jesus, to preach Jesus. He gives us the example himself: he would retire to pray to the Father and then he would go immediately to meet those hungry and thirsty for God, to heal them and save them. This is the basis of the importance of “mystagogic” catechesis, which is the constant encounter with the Word and with the sacraments and not something which is merely occasional, before the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation. Christian life is a process of growth and integration of all the dimensions of a person on a community journey of listening and answering (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 166).

Furthermore, catechists are *creative*; they seek to use different means and forms to proclaim Christ. It is beautiful to believe in Jesus because he is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6) who fills our existence with joy and cheerfulness. This endeavour to make Jesus known as the highest form of beauty brings us to encounter new signs and ways to transmit the faith. The means may be different but what is important is to keep in mind the style of Jesus who adapted to the people he had before him in order to bring them closer to the love of God. One must know how to “change”, to adapt in order to bring the message closer, though it is always the same, because God does not change, but renews all things in him. In the creative endeavour to make Jesus known, we must not have fear because he is ahead of us in this task. He is already in today’s man and he awaits us there.

Dear catechists, I thank you for what you do, but especially because you walk with the People of God. I encourage you to be joyful messengers, custodians of the good and of the beauty which shines through the faithful life of the missionary disciple.

May Jesus bless you and may the Holy Virgin, true “educator of the faith”, take care of you.

And please, do not forget to pray for me.

*From the Vatican, 5 July*

FRANCIS

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