



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

Prot. N. 18/127 ENG

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PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV
TO PRIESTS ON HOLY THURSDAY

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Mt 28:19-20).

Dearly Beloved in Christ priests
Honorable Brothers-seminarians!

First of all I wish to greet you on the day of Christ's priests! Today, on Holy Thursday, we remember how our Lord Jesus Christ serves His disciples, washes their feet, gathers them in a chamber to eat the Passover, speaks to them and guides them, leaving them the greatest gift for mankind—Himself in the Most Holy Eucharist, and for its permanent celebration He establishes the Holy Mystery of the Priesthood. We, too, are called by our Savior to follow Him, to imitate Him, to be His servants, to give Him generously to others, for Christ came in order to serve and give His life for many (see Mt 20:28). The mission, which our Lord entrusted to us of His goodness, is not our privilege or merit, but our vocation, a gift of God's love and a great responsibility.

This vocation includes a mission responsibility — *instruction and education in faith* of the people of God entrusted to us. We are to pass on to others the salvific teaching, make disciples of Christ all to whom the holy Church sends us, proclaim to them the Word of God, teaching them the truths of the holy faith, and guiding the faithful of all age categories in spiritual growth. I would like to direct your attention to this task—to catechetical ministry, the goal of which is primarily to bring a person to an encounter with Jesus Christ, so that he or she, having come to know Him, can believe in Him and live in unity with Him.

Catechetical ministry to the faithful of our Church is a primary duty of every priest-minister, and a duty which no one has the right to refuse or perform carelessly. The life and development of our Church, parish, and society depend on the conscientious fulfillment of this duty.

Today, not all of us fully comprehend our personal responsibility for catechetical ministry. However, it is precisely the priest-minister, the one whom Christ has called to be the visible and active image of Himself—the Good Shepherd—that should care for the

growth and maturation in faith of every person entrusted to his care by Him. With great trepidation we observe today that even those who frequently come to our churches know very little about the God in Whom they believe. The obligation to bring a person of today closer to God, to help them know and love Him, to understand the basic truths of our faith better and better, to live by these truths and proclaim them in the world of today – that is the meaning of pastoral ministry, of safeguarding the souls of the flock entrusted to us by Christ. We are called to open up and help our faithful understand the Word of the Divine Gospel, so that they might know Jesus, believe in Him, and become His authentic and convinced disciples and followers, and build a relationship with our Savior. That is why the teaching of the faith is at the heart of the priestly ministry.

It is necessary to not only catechize children preparing for their first Holy Confession. The need for teaching ministry is not any lesser for youth and adults, those who are threatened by the danger of a loss of faith, as well as those who seek answers for the difficult questions of their life. The priest is the one who for our people should be a living icon of the Divine Teacher, the conduit through whose ministry the faithful can draw upon the heavenly wisdom that is being passed on to them by the Christ's Church.

In our Church there are many trained and dedicated lay and religious catechists. Therefore, the clergy should invite them to minister in the parishes, care for their spiritual life and adequate preparation, guide them and assist them. However, I wish to emphasize that lay catechists are there to assist the priests and cannot completely replace them. Thus, a priest cannot remove himself from his personal responsibility which has been placed on him for quality catechetical ministry to his parishioners, regardless of their age. This responsibility foresees not only the ability to adequately organize catechetical ministry in the parish, but also the obligation to be the first and the model catechist for all age groups of faithful.

A well-organized catechetical school or at least a catechetical community can help in the proper organization of catechesis. It is necessary to ensure cooperation with those responsible for catechetical ministry in the eparchy or exarchate. Standing before the face of Christ and calling Him our Teacher, we should ask ourselves: why today – when decades have passed since we received the gift of freedom for our Church in Ukraine, and our communities abroad can freely develop – do we have parishes in which there is no catechesis? How can a parish be vibrant without regular, well-established, quality catechesis or school of faith?

I call upon all priests to “revive the gift” they received from the Lord, and their zeal in serving Him, so that in our parishes there be no one who has not come to know our Savior and Lord or His teaching, who do not know the truths of the holy faith, and, therefore, cannot pass them on to others.

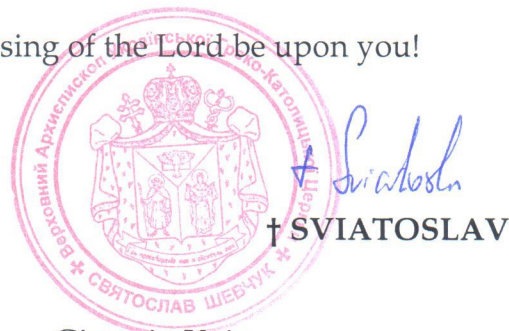
The Church calls on us to rethink our methods of catechetical ministry and evangelization. The more we reflect and pray on the Word of God in the Gospel, to more fervently we nurture our personal and liturgical prayer, the more we discover our faith. The more we love God and neighbor, the more we strive to serve, demonstrating sensitivity to the needs of the people of God.

The Christian household and family has a special place in the fostering and transmission of faith. We can say without exaggeration that parents are the first catechists of their children. The Venerable Andrey Sheptytsky reminds us: "Having to work on the salvation of the people entrusted to us by the Lord, having to sanctify their live through Christ's teaching, we must work on the Christian family."¹ Parents need catechesis in order to guide their children in catechetical instruction and create for them a quiet family environment at home, which promotes an understanding of Christ's faith and growth in it. Thus, the domestic Church is the first school of faith, prayer, and service, and the church community assists adults in this task and guides them. Saint Pope John Paul II assures us: "The more the Church, whether on the local or the universal level, gives catechesis priority over other works and undertakings the results of which would be more spectacular, the more she finds in catechesis a strengthening of her internal life as a community of believers and of her external activity as a missionary Church."²

Beloved fellow-workers in Christ's priesthood! In greeting you on this holy and great day, I hope to express my sincere gratitude to all of you who, without expecting praise or reward, fervently serve God and our people. I especially thank those among you who by their personal example bring people closer to God, who share with them their own experience of faith and prayer, who safeguard their souls and engage in active catechetical ministry, helping others know Christ, who through you wants to become the Teacher of our people. Let us all take to heart the words of St. Paul to Timothy: "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2Tim 4:2).

May the Most Holy Theotokos, our Mother and Protector of priests, with her motherly prayer and example of faith, in her readiness to serve God and humanity, intercede before the Lord for all the priests of our Church, that we be granted sensitivity to the needs of humanity, a readiness and fervor to serve according to Christ's example – our sole Teacher and Lord.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!



Given in Kyiv

at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the Day of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, March 22, 2018 A.D.

¹ Pastoral Letter on the Catechesis of Children, February 11, 1905.

² Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time, «Catechesi Tradendae», par. 15.