

**Catechetical Sunday
September 21, 2008**

A few weeks ago I wrote about the Catholic schools in our diocese and the excellent educational opportunity they provide for the students who attend them. A larger number of Catholic young people are enrolled in the fine public schools of the North Country. These students, numbering over 10,000, can receive religious education in parish programs throughout the year and in special religious education vacation programs.

On Sunday, September 21st, we celebrate these schools and programs and the catechists, over 900 throughout our diocese, who share their faith and the witness of their lives with our young people.

The theme for this year's Catechetical celebration is *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. This is also the theme of a special Synod of Bishops which will be taking place in Rome during October. During that meeting, bishops from all over the world will gather to pray, study, and discuss the role that Sacred Scripture plays in the Church's life and mission. By choosing this theme, the catechetical community in the United States is invited to make the study of the Word of God its focus for the coming year as well.

The Word of God is larger than Sacred Scripture. The Word of God is Jesus Christ, the only Son of God. So this catechetical year should focus both on Jesus Christ and on the Sacred Scriptures.

In our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs our catechists need to share with their students the different ways God's Word is present. It is present in:

- Scripture, the living Word of God, proclaimed as we gather for Sunday Mass;**
- the Church as she faithfully passes on and interprets the Word of God for every generation;**
- in our personal prayer as we reflect on the scriptures;**
- in the community of the Church as she receives, celebrates and lives the Word of God.**

The Word of God is the source, the subject, and the means by which we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. These are valuable lessons to be taught and if done properly, they will last a lifetime.

Our parish catechists have a very short time with their students, meeting, as they do, once a week for approximately one hour. It is imperative that the lessons taught are reinforced at home. Just as a parent might ask what a child learned in school, the parent should also ask the child what they learned in their religious education classes. This will indicate the parent's interest in the class, enable them to discuss the lesson with their children and clarify any questions the child may have.

Parents are the first and best teachers of their children in the ways of faith. They should be actively involved in the religious education

of their young, knowing what they are learning and providing good example in the practice of the faith. Above all, it is important that parents participate in Sunday Mass with their children. Grandparents and other family members can also be helpful in this regard, showing by their example the importance of regular attendance at Sunday Mass.

The Word of God enriches each life. I know that parents want to enrich the lives of their children as well. All of us are called to evangelize. For most of us that can take place right in the family circle. Please join me in passing on the faith to your children. It is a sacred responsibility. It is a duty that should be fulfilled with joy. In doing it well, you will be able to say with St. Paul, “I have fought the good fight, I have run the race, I await the merited crown.” (2 Tim 4:7)

Most Rev. Robert J. Cunningham
Bishop of Ogdensburg
September 8, 2008