

## **"A CATECHIST CONVERSATION"**

**Presented by Bishop Frank Joseph Caggiano**

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**Transcript**

Bishop: I'm delighted that you are here, particularly given the weather. That shows your commitment, my friends, to this great ministry that we share, which is the ministry of catechesis. Ordinarily we don't have these sort of events. They will become more frequent because the hour of our challenge continues to grow.

And that's why we're here. I ordinarily would not ask you to make the sacrifice except for the fact that I'm asking you to join with me in a call to arms. But not combat in the normal sense. But really it is a combat for the hearts of our young people and young adults and those entrusted to our care in catechesis.

For it is a battle that is evolving. And it seems to me, at least from my experience, that we have many people in this room who are working extremely hard to try to pass on the faith that you and I love to help our people to encounter the Lord whom you and I love and are having mixed results, to say the least. We face a lot of indifference, and at times we can be easily discouraged.

What I want us to do tonight is to be reaffirmed in hope. For there is a way forward. But it depends on how courageous, creative you and I are willing to be, and how we are willing to re-imagine, retool, even—if I may use this terminology—blow up what we're doing now and offer it to Christ so that he may reform it in a way that will yield greater fruit.

The truth of the matter is I want to begin by simply saying to all of you how grateful I am for the ministry that you do. You do realize that you are doing the work of catechesis not because your DRE asked you to. Not because your pastor asked you to. Certainly not for the money involved, that we all know. And not because you chose it, but the truth is you are doing this ministry because the Lord chose you to do it. And He knows your gifts and talents better than you do. He knows your faults and failings as he knows mine more than you do. And that he has chosen you, my friends, as he has chosen me, to be his hands and feet and voice in the world to pass on this Good News that Pope Francis reminds us over and over again, which is at the heart of catechesis. I'm grateful that you have been faithful in the trenches for a long time. But remember, if Christ has called us to this, Christ will give us the means by which we can do it effectively. Where we can do it to his honor and glory. Where we

can do it to see growing fruits, not diminishing fruits. Where we can bind together to show the world a better way, for the world is desperately in need of a better way. We can do this.

What I'm asking for you is to hear me out tonight as to what it is I'm asking us to do together. And then we will break it open. Today, tonight, in the months and years ahead. So what is it at the heart of what I'm going to be asking? Fr. Frank Diciano wrote a book a few years ago that perhaps you have read. Certainly the title is very familiar to all of us. It is "From Maintenance to Mission." Sound familiar? No? OK. My talk is over then. (Laughter)

No, I'll explain it. It's easy. I'll tell you my own life history. When I was a little boy, before I went to Catholic school, I had already fallen in love with the Lord because of the example of my mother and father, because of the neighborhood I lived in, because of the traditions my family had around holiday time, including these times now, Advent and Christmas. Because of my mother's and father's love of their patron saints, because my mother taught me the Rosary when I was three years old and I would sit on her lap and pray it. All those things in my early youth allowed me to encounter the person of Jesus Christ. I fell in love with him because my mother and father were in love with him. And I went to Catholic school, and my friends went to religious education to continue that development. It had already begun. And so the sisters and my lay teachers gave me the language to understand what was going on already inside of me, introduced me to the Sacraments, and helped me to prepare for the Sacraments that my parents were not able to do for me. But I went to them. And they maintained what my parents have begun.

Now my friends, is it not true that more and more young people and young adults are coming to us without what I just described? They have not yet, for whatever reason, have not yet encountered the Lord as more than just an historic person. That their hearts are looking for more but they are not yet on fire for the one we love who is Jesus the Lord. They are eager. They are looking. So we are no longer simply doing maintenance. We are doing mission. We are the ones who are going to be instrumental in helping to allow that moment of encounter to occur, to allow young people to touch the presence of God. And that puts us in very different roles than perhaps 30, 40, 50 years ago.

The truth of the matter is, my friends, many times you and I will be in the position to be spiritual mothers and fathers to those who come to us. And as I will say later on in my talk, my two asks of you, the first to ask is this: We can not give to whom we do not know and continue to fall in love with. So if we're about encounter and mission, it is more than just getting what's in the textbook into their heads. There is

much more than that. And that's part of the dynamic I want to unfold for you. Missionary Discipleship, Pope Francis teaches us, is all about going out and mission to those who need to mediate the presence of God one person at a time. That's the summary of what he's asking of us. To bring the Good News of what? God's love, forgiveness, mercy, and the truth: that God is in himself the truth of how to live a human life, what it is to be human, what it is to be the hearer of the Word, what it is to be the recipient of redemption, the offer of redemption in Jesus Christ, what it means to be part of the mystical body of Christ, what it means to go out in charity to become the presence of the Lord in the world.

See, there is mercy in truth. Mission is about both. You and I are the ministers of both. That, my friends, is the paradigm. But the million dollar question is how do we get from maintenance to mission?

Before we do that, we need to be clear-minded about the challenge before us. For to be young, whether a young person or young adult, in this world is a daunting challenge. It is a daunting challenge to be young and find your way to Jesus Christ.

So I have some observations. I always do have observations. OK. And I'm going to lay them out here because I want you to react. Feel free to say, "Bishop, what you just described I have not seen." Because perhaps it's not a common experience, but I'm going to lay out a few characteristics of what I call the landscape. So what has changed? Because we need to understand that to be able to respond to it. And then we will go to the response, which I will summarize into asks.

So let's talk about the landscape. You have heard me say this many times, my friends. We live in a world where a lot of people say, "I am spiritual, but I am not religious." Who has heard that? Raise your hand. Thank you Lord. "I am spiritual, but I am not religious." Bishop Caggiano's abbreviation for that is this: Spiritual is me, religious is we.

When a person says they are spiritual, what they are really saying is: I still value and desire a relationship with God. I want to find God in a meaningful way in my life. I want to have this relationship, however I am not religious, which means I do not need you to find Him.

I don't need you. And quite frankly, if I need more than one, I will make my own community. Because now with technology, which we will talk about, you can create your own community of people who share your opinions, think the way you do, and not a community that happens to have people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, and struggles and pains.

You see, the church community is a different reality. We live in a world that can create community from the bottom up into our own image and likeness. In that world, the first characteristic is disaffiliation, which means either the conscious or implicit choice that a person makes to say: "I do not want to affiliate with a community to find my way to God. I will do it on my own."

I believe, my friends, Pope Francis has made a tremendous impact on the church already. But quite frankly I believe history will teach us that Francis came as the pope with the courage to ask one question and the question is this: What does it take for every community of faith to become credible in the eyes of the people out there? Credible meaning compelling. Credible meaning to be seen as having value. Credible in the sense that it's a community that I would wish to belong to, to affiliate with. For the first great challenge is the crisis of communities and their place in our society, particularly in the church.

Now let's get more practical. What does that look like, disaffiliation? I mean, people don't wake up and say, "OK, yesterday I was a Catholic, today I've decided I'm done." There's something else at work.

So I'm going to give you, if I may, an exercise, which you are not to do out loud. Especially if you're sitting next to your wife or husband. Think of the very first person you fell in love with. Which hopefully is your wife or husband, but may not be. But you think back when we were young, when you fall in love, what happens?

The first thing that happens is you're attracted, say "Wow!" And then immediately you have a whole number of questions in your mind. Is she for real? Is she the way she appears? Can she be trusted? Because that's normal. And what happens is, in a relationship you resolve those questions one question at a time, and you go deeper into the relationship until the day comes when you say, "I'm in. This person is worth it." And that begins that process of a lifetime of falling in love. Right?

That, my friends, is the process of affiliation. Affiliation with a person. And if, in this process of having this relationship with the person, the person does something that offends you, if the relationship has been developing, that's not the occasion to say, "I'm done, see you." But rather it raises a question that demands an answer. You confront the person and say, "Why did you do this or say that to me? Because I love you." And you work it out. And it can actually strengthen the relationship.

You see, my friends, when we say disaffiliation, what we are really saying is: What happens with an individual happens with a community. That you enter into a relationship with a community, in this case the Church. And in that sharing of life

that relationship grows. But then when questions arise, those questions need to be answered. Because if they're not answered, then it begins to create a disconnect. And for young people in particular, as more and more questions come up in their heads that they seek an answer for and they can't find the answer, or they can't make sense of the answer, then what happens is a distance begins to grow, until finally one day they say, not out of anger, not out of malice, they simply say, "You know what? All the stuff you're teaching is just too complicated. It's too much work. I don't understand it. And you know what? I'm just going to move on."

That's the phenomenon of disaffiliation. It is accelerating in the church. It's accelerating throughout the world. And to give you an example of how much it's accelerating: Twenty years ago, this whole process of questioning... And let me just say this: Young people at the age of 12 are asking questions now that when I was 24 I wouldn't even have imagined asking, and I'm not the only one in this room. Come on. (Laughter) OK, good. 20 years ago, high school kids and college students were grappling with disaffiliation. The evidence tells us now, my friends, that it begins at the age of 7, and by the age of 13 most young people already are on their way to disaffiliation.

So we need to face this phenomenon. And part of the reimagining is to be able to create spaces, safe spaces, where young people can ask their questions without fear, and to engage them in how those questions can be answered. Pope Francis uses the fancy word "accompaniment". But, in effect, accompaniment means: I walk with you. As we grow in relationship, you will have the freedom to ask what it is that doesn't make sense, that doesn't resonate in your heart so that I can walk with you like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Walk two by two to help, not only to learn the faith, but to have those questions resolved.

First characteristic: disaffiliation. Have you experienced it? (Some yes's from audience.) Anyone want to speak to it quickly? ...

Very Catholic group. Really. (Laughter)

Speaker 1: Debbie and I were talking about it tonight on our way here. We have eight children. Seven of them we've raised since birth. One we received at 9 years old and, on the way here tonight, we've come to the conclusion it has been the most difficult of times for us to grow her in our values. And you were speaking of disaffiliation. It occurred, we believe it occurred by the time she was five. And so our job is going to be lifelong with her, and it gives us great sadness that she will experience pain, disillusionment, all of that, and all we continue to do is pray for her and try and live an example for her.

Bishop: Thank you for sharing that first. And secondly, we're going to come back to what you just said as one of my asks because I think it's an essential key.

Speaker 2: From teaching kids from when they were younger, and I see them get older in the neighborhood, they're sponges, they grasp the emotions that cause us to sin, but as they start getting older, they're influenced by the parents who forgot the emotions like anger and greed and pride. So they're sponges when they're young but I see as they get older, they're now mimicking... (inaudible)

Bishop: Right. Exactly. Which leads to the second characteristic, if I may. Second thing that I've seen in my ministry is: in this world that I'm describing there is a tremendous amount of anxiety and loneliness among a lot of young people. Among people in general. What do I mean?

We live in a world where, because of mass media, there is this implicit request that everyone be perfect at everything that's done. That's before our parents, with the best of intentions, whether they know it or not, place a tremendous amount of pressure on their children to excel, to get into the best colleges, to be the best athlete. And it goes on and on and on.

Anxiety, my friends, I define anxiety as undifferentiated fear. If I'm afraid of this, I can name it. It's a fear. But if I have a general fear of things that I can't even name, that's anxiety. And it seems to me that in our world, many many people are no longer comfortable in their own skin.

They are not comfortable with their faults. They are not comfortable being imperfect. They are not comfortable.

They are not comfortable. And when you are detached, when you become isolated, that anxiety can become far more grave.

And we live in a world that does not unite us, but wants to divide us. And therefore you can see why the opioid epidemic in our midst could simply be an in-vain attempt to deaden the anxiety, this great anxiety so many people are beginning to feel, especially our young people.

Now, what does that have to do with what we do? Because let me marry it, my friends, to the next, which is: we live in a world, with that being going on, that most young people at one time or another question their self-worth. The greatest challenge we face in the society in which we live, hyper consumeristic, hyper materialistic, hypersexual, and concerned about immediate gratification.

In that world, more and more people, particularly young people as they're forming, find it hard to believe that they are lovable or loved, even though their parents are desperately trying to love them. It does not register. Because if you are being compared to the perfect, to the cool, to the "in", I mean, consider, my friends: Now we can quantify how much you are liked. Think of the implications of that. Think of how much anxiety that is when Frank goes to school and Jane has 55 likes and I have 3. Now we are older. But for a 9 year old, or a 12 year old, or a 6 year old? "Does anybody like me?" "Does anybody love me?" And then it's the race to be accepted. This is a whole new world, my friends, a whole new frontier. And these are the struggles that our young people before us are struggling with.

So in a world where you wonder whether you are loved or lovable, this becomes the problem. We live in a religious context, where the fundamental premise of all Christian revelation can be summarized in one sentence in the first epistle of St. John, in the fourth chapter. John has the sacred audacity to say, "God is Love." Period.

Notice he does not say, "God loves." But, "God is Love." That, my friends, is the fundamental revelation of Christian life. "Why?" you may say. Let me give you an example. If God is Love, God is in himself more than one, for love demands more than one. He is a trinity of Divine Love, of which one, the son, came into creation in flesh and blood. Why? To conquer sin and death, the antithesis of what love is. To offer the Holy Spirit, who comes into our hearts to unite us with him and with one another so that we might live Matthew 25. To live love concretely, to bring his presence into the world.

I can go on and on and on. Forgiveness of sins, all the rest. It's all a consequence of recognizing, accepting, and giving. Love, who is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If I'm uncomfortable in my skin, anxious, isolated and lonely, these are the temptations, and I wonder whether I'm loved or lovable. This is the conclusion. You people are talking about love. I'm not sure anybody loves me. What you're talking about is fantasy. It's fable. It's myth. It's a nice story, but I'm not sure it fits in my life. That's part of the challenge we are facing in a world that is growing cold in the giving and receiving of love.

Now take a deep breath, there are three more. (Laughter)

Technology. You know, I'm 58 years old. I know I don't look it, but I'm 58 years old. (Laughter)

I look like I'm 158 years old! That's another talk. (Laughter)

So technology for me is a tool. For my two and a half year old grand neice, who loves Uncle Frank dearly, technology is forming her very life. You see it.

There are studies, my friends, that the opportunity of technology is becoming a challenge when the physiology of the brain is changing. You and I have a dominant and recessive lobe. That's why we fall into different kinds of categories. Musical, mathematic, more visual, more hands on. Because we've always developed, for generations, a dominant and recessive lobe. Technology is creating something different. Technology is physiologically changing young people for when they are young because of the way they are engaged, so that there are equal lobes in the brain developing equally, which means that there is free-flowing creativity.

So on one hand you say, "This is great!" On the other hand, let me give you the downside: The average young person cognates more with image than with words. That is why a videogame can be produced, released to the market, and generate a billion dollars worth of sales in 36 hours. Do you know there is active research now to create—don't laugh, it's serious—a YouTube-based elementary school? Right. Because the evidence indicates that young people actually learn more effectively by video and image than by traditional teaching. Do you see the implication for us?

Now, let me give you some of the finer points of the challenge. We live, we share a faith that has a sacred text, that has a catechism and creed. Now how do you tweet that out in 140 characters?

So technology is something we need in this reimagining to take, tame, baptize, and use to make it an opportunity for what we call catechesis. But it will not be easy. And the attention span of people using technology, including old people, is getting shorter and shorter and shorter. And in a world where people text each other the most intimate things, where they post their secrets on Facebook, where they can sit at a dinner, five at a family, and not speak to each other, but I guess they're texting to each other? I have no idea what they're doing. (Laughter)

It's a different world. But that's our world. And now for the icing on the cake. And in this world there are two premises most young people, young adults, and even now all of us, are beginning to share even if we don't realize it.

The first is almost everyone has accepted that there is a complete divorce between faith and reason, faith and science. You will hear young people say, OK, well, evolution, science, theories, cosmology, you know, that's fact. Fact. And hearing faith is, I wouldn't say opinion, but it's, you know, what we can agree on. But the truth of the matter is, if science can answer the question then I don't need faith, I'll go to

science. Does that sound like your experience? And I'm simplifying it. But there's a fundamental problem. And the fundamental problem, my friends, is, as Catholic believers, as catechist, we accept what St. Thomas taught long ago when he said, "Grace builds on nature." Or to put it another way: Faith is reasonable. And reason is a way to encounter God. They are not enemies. They are friends. But we live in a world that says that could not possibly be.

And the other is this: You have heard of, you know, all of these controversies with transgenderism and gender identity and all the rest. The truth of the matter is, whether it comes to all of the social issues of our time, particularly when they are sexual or moral, there is a premise that the modern world has that most of our young people probably don't realize, but in some way, shape, or form have come along with because they've been raised with it because it's the premise behind most of what's reported in the news and in social media and in entertainment that is not Christian, and it's simply this: What makes a human person?

The average person in the 21st century would answer that question by saying Frank Joseph Caggiano is the center of his consciousness, his subjectivity. It's that spiritual part of him that is who he says he is, that happens to be held in this body. This body, though, is not him. It's that center of subjectivity. That consciousness.

There was a famous gentleman not long ago, scientist, who said we are going to see a humanity in 50 years where we will reach the height of human life, when we can transfer this consciousness into a machine. That would guaranteed that we could live forever.

On the other hand, we have Christian faith that says: We believe every Sunday in the resurrection of body. That, my friends, is an essential piece to the question of what makes a human person.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he did not rise as a center of consciousness. He didn't rise as a ghost or spirit. He rose in his glorified body because Jesus of Nazareth, unto forever, the glorified Son of God, has with him his glorified humanity, which includes his glorified body. When I rise from the dead, I will rise body, soul, and spirit, because I am not who I am without this body. It is not a container for the real me. And therefore you can speak of all the controversies that we are living in based on the misconception of what I just described. Two competing views of human personhood.

Those are the challenges before us.

Let's talk a bit about them. Any of that not resonate with your experience? Or anyone want to add or subtract to what I said? Speak now or forever hold your peace. (Laughter)

Speaker 3: One thing I just wanted to add. In the world and the way it's going, Mass is still said the same way as when I was a kid, so for young people today... (inaudible) When we talk about the readings and the gospel, we don't talk about them as if it's us. Those are us. Adam and Eve, that's us. We're sitting here hearing the same stories over and over... (inaudible)

Bishop: We're going to talk about that. Excellent point. Hold that thought. I just want to (inaudible) one thing if I may, again from my history, because you know more of my history than my relatives know of my history! But when my mother was alive, she used to do this all the time. It would embarrass the blazes out of me when I was a little kid. But when people would come over, she'd pull out that one favorite family album, photo album. This is little Frank on the bed, five days old... (Laughter) Flip the page, ma! (Laughter)

But those pictures are historic relics of the past. If you did not have the connection to the family, a living, loving connection... that's why we carry photos of the people we love in our pocketbooks or in our wallets. Because we're not us-versus-them, it's us. And when you think of the sacred stories in the Gospel, in the Epistles, and even in the Old Testament... It's not us versus them or they "just as history." That's part of our family history.

And there's a living relationship that can easily happen over time. You see, my friends, the picture I just painted to you gives me great hope. And you may say, what did this man drink before he came down? (Laughter)

Gives me great hope. Why? Why? Because we have the better way.

People are beginning to ask. This cannot be everything that was promised. People are beginning to say, "Is this where we are going?" Or they're asking, "Where will all of this go to?" Sound familiar?

We have the path. And therefore, my friends, I'm giving you license to reimagine the path with me, with your pastors, with your DREs, with the leaders of the church. Right now—if I could be a little melodramatic—right now we are on the road to Emmaus. And remember, the word "emmaus" literally means "nowhere."

We may feel we're on the path going nowhere because, "All my work and these kids don't go to Mass!", "All my work and the parents dropped them off and they don't

seem interested!", "All my work is that I'm trying to do RCIA and do the Rite of Christian Initiation of adults and six months later I don't see them in church anymore!", "I'm spending all these hours with diminishing returns!", "It seems ever going to Emmaus!" But the Lord is here, right here with us saying: Let me explain to you the path I want to take. And I'm going to ask you for the courage to take it. And there are two asks I want to end my talk with and then pass it on to the staff to break open with you. Ask number one:

As it was true in the ancient church, it is now true today. A catechist is first and foremost a witness to the faith. You are not first a teacher. You are first a witness, as I am. What does that mean to your point? What that means, my friends, is this:

Long after your students, your young adults, the people you are involved with and working with, long after they will forget some of the details of what you have taught them, they will not forget you. In the ancient church, if you remember from Sacred Scripture, in a time when the church did not have a catechism or written creed, and even that the hierarchy was forming, they had community and they had witness, and the church had the largest, most explosive growth in its entire history was in that age when the penalty to be a Christian was death.

Why? Because there was authentic witness.

So my first ask is in the morning, in the evening, before you prepare your lessons for religious ed or your youth ministry lesson or whatever your social activity or service project, I want you and I to look ourselves in the mirror, sit in a chair, find time to pray. Fall in love with the Lord more deeply and be a courageous witness of what we believe. Before you teach them, love them. Before you instruct them, be merciful to them. Work with them, whoever the "them" is.

And that witness, my friends, is the most powerful tool we have to foster the encounter of what we spoke about when I spoke about a Jesus Christ, is to allow them, through you, to glimpse the person of the Lord. And you and I are the vehicle of that mercy, accompaniment, love, and forgiveness. Once that happens then the desire for the language of the Faith, for the tenants of the faith, and for all that comes with that which I'm going to talk about in a second, will flow. But absent that, they are just attending class like they're attending math class. Sound familiar? And you get the same results as math class. But we want them to fall in love and change the world. So my first ask is: you cannot give to whom you do not know, do not love, and do not completely fall in love with; your most important lesson plan begins with you and love.

Number one. Number two. Patrick, may I have the poster? Oh, you have it up here? Ah. Here you are.

The second, my friends, is this: Even though we will do this in different ways in different communities because of our differences, reimagining catechesis is imagining walking this path. And if you can see it, or if you have it in front of you, what I'm going to ask you and I is to have courage in every place we go, in every community of which we are a part, to be able to go through these different steps. For this, my friends, is a map. It's right here in the back of the book. ... I have the big one because I'm the bishop. (Laughter) OK, my friends, why don't you gather your resources and then we're going to go through this very quickly. Wish I had some of that intermission music.

My friends, I need 10 more minutes of your attention. And these are probably the 10 most important minutes of this presentation. This map. Because you know what? The goal of all catechesis, the goal of all evangelization, is to get everybody to the finish line, which is here. We start here and we end here. Our goal is to create an army of missionary disciples who will do for others what we are doing for them, to unleash the power of grace and faith in the world. But it begins here with encounter. We've already talked about it: To meet the Lord in a way that captures them so that they can come to love him. And we spoke about the different ways to do that. But, my friends, growing in faith gives you three ways in particular to try to foster this encounter and to deepen it. The three ways are given by St. Thomas Aquinas when Thomas said there are three principal ways to encounter God: Truth, beauty, and goodness.

Let's unpack all three.

Truth. I just said young people have questions they want resolved. As those questions become resolved, truth is a way for them to encounter the Lord who says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." There are some where the truth of the faith is compelling, and is the avenue by which they can meet the Lord. Some of the most famous conversions in the church in our own age are occurring, particularly with the study of the fathers. The truth is compelling.

The second to your point is beauty, because the world I just described is a very sterile one, isn't it? It's almost a cold one. That loneliness almost depicts kind of a grayness to life.

But life is meant to be lived in the fullness of the beauty God intended. Many times people will say mass is boring. What they're really saying is they have not been

engaged. Right? And we have spent 50 years in the reform since the Vatican Council trying to engage people here, and what we have sometimes forgotten is you also engage people here.

I'll give you an example. When I was a little boy, Saints Simon and Jude, the old church, was a wooden country church when Brooklyn had country. Long gone! (Laughter) And it was, I forget, 12 or 13 steps up to it. And of course as soon as I could walk, my mother would, you know, she would carry me and then we would walk up, and I remember it was like climbing Mt. Everest to get to the top.

Then we walk into church. And it smelled like a church. I don't know how to describe that, but it smelled. And when you go into the pew, and the eucharistic time, at the prayer, we all knelt. No discussion. Genuflect when you first came in because the Lord was there. Then go to the pew. You say your prayers on your knees, and then at the consecration, we were on our knees. Now I was so young, I couldn't see over the pew. OK. (Inaudible) So we negotiated that I was the first one in the pew, because I would look around the side of the pew. And I can tell you till the day I die, I remember the red, deep blood red velvet drapes that were behind the high altar. I remember being captivated by the cross that was in front of it. I can still feel the velvet even though I never touched it. I remember the bells. And the flowers. And the quiet. I remember the chant.

All of that, my friends, was a small example of the power of beauty. Music. Art. Literature. Nature. All are expressions of God being the beautiful one. When we look at catechesis it cannot simply be of the mind. The mind's important, so we have to engage the heart. We have to rediscover the power of beauty.

And let me give you a concrete example of how the Holy Spirit is doing this: If you ask young people throughout the United States what fascinates them the most when it comes to religious observance? Those movements and communities that are growing rapidly, at the heart of it, at many times is Eucharistic adoration, and I am absolutely certain that for a good number of those young people and young adults, they do not have a full understanding of the Eucharist yet, but they are being engaged because in that sacred space is a stark difference from the rest of what they call their ordinary life. And that, my friends, is the power of beauty. Where is beauty in our work?

And the last of course is goodness. You're already doing that because your engaging young people to service. Right? And they love it. You tell them, "take that house apart", they'll do it. They love it. Oftentimes they don't know why they are doing it, which is part of this encounter with the Lord, but I'm going to tell you something

else, my friends. Saint Thomas, in this encounter with God, is not just speaking about community service 25 hours. What he's talking about is virtue. Temperance. Prudence. Perseverance. Fortitude. All of the virtues. To rediscover their meaning in life.

Because they have a compelling way of bringing people to the source of all virtue, who is God. See, we didn't even get to your CCD book yet... (inaudible) Because then there comes a moment when, step three, "Who do you say that I am?" You're absolutely enthralled with beauty, but there's someone behind that beauty.

You're fascinated with scientific truth. Go into the cosmos and look at the magnificence of the universe. There's someone behind that. You want to live a life of integrity and honesty. You know what? There's someone else behind that. Who do you say that I am? It's the explicit call to faith in Jesus Christ. Not as a taken-for-granted, but as a request. And from there, my friends, if this is going on, people will say, "OK I'll take the first step."

And then the Lord has them. Why? Because when I fall in love, there are two things. If I fell in love with you, there are two things I want to do. I want to know everything about you, and I want to spend as much time as possible with you. Sound familiar? I described evangelizing catechesis, teaching them everything to know about the person they love and spend time with him, in personal and communal prayer, including the sacrifice of the mass, which is no longer then a requirement, but an opportunity for me to spend time with the person I have fallen in love with and want to get to know better. See, the reverse of disaffiliation, now it is affiliation growing deeper and deeper.

If this and this do not happen, what I described here cannot happen effectively, but once it happens, then the Lord will take them the rest of the way because we will accompany them, they will be accompanied in the community of the church which is not of their own making, but they will discover that God is not of their own making because God made us in His image and likeness and humanity ever since has been trying to make God into our image and likeness.

And it doesn't work. They will discover the value of a community that loves them, but the community needs to love them. And then, my friends, we get to the end, because when all of that has happened, they will become the next generation of catechist witnesses.

And then the world out there... Let me end with this apocalyptic statement. And I mean this. I mean this with all my heart. You may think I'm crazy when this is over.

There's a long list of people that think that already. (Laughter) But the world out there that has become secular and smug, that wants no place for faith as we describe it, that is desperately trying to avoid the embreaking of grace in the person of Jesus Christ, that world has no idea what is coming. For if we do this, if we have the courage to do this, and even if we fail 99 times with the things we're going to try to do, but if we do this with humility and courage and succeed maybe once, the power that will be unleashed in this world for the good, for unity, for harmony, for peace, for faith, and for a renewal of what we hold dear in our hearts, will bring this entire world out there to its knees in adoration of the only God who exists.

This is the challenge before us, my friends, and I'm going to ask you to put your hands to the plow and let us do this together, because we can do this. My friends, thank you for your attention. (Applause)

And now I pass you on to the staff. Questions? Yes of course. Easy questions only, it's 5 to 8. (Laughter)

Speaker 4: How do we get the parents to get the children to come to Mass? We can only go so far.

Bishop: Absolutely. OK, so, great question, and let me answer it this way: However we reimagine catechesis, the days of "that's your job", parents speaking to a catechist, "just get my kid ready for first holy communion or confirmation", those days, my friends, are O-V-E-R. They are over. (Applause) We need to reimagine catechesis for the entire church. Everyone is called.

Everyone is called to grow in their love and knowledge of the Lord. So, how we do that with parents, that's where it's going to get tricky. I'm going to ask you to experiment how we can do it. Some things will work. Some things won't work. But part of what I'm asking is we are one family here, my friends, we are not competitors. We're all in this together. We are all going to heaven. Please God. So the bottom line is, I think, we're going to share what works and what doesn't work. We're starting a great experiment, but I'm going to give you an example, what I think would be great.

OK. Parents. Most parents are not affiliated with the church because they have their own questions that have not been answered. They have their own pains. Their hearts have been broken in their own way. And, just like we're going to do with young people, we have to do with our parents. We have to accompany them and walk with them. Can you imagine, for example, if you had, during this religious ed year or your youth ministry, an opportunity to bring three or four parent couples

together for no reason but a meal and fraternity. And it is amazing what will come out of a nice bowl of pasta and a glass of red wine. (Laughter)

And you know what? Why I say that is because we need to love them too, not just their children. This is not to be adversarial. We need to love them.

Speaker 4: I was told we weren't supposed to call parents.

Bishop: Well, that's part of the things we'll talk about. (Laughter) Remember, we are not consumers, and nor are they. So that's part of what we need to rethink too.

What were you going to ask?

Speaker 5: Actually, I don't have a question, but that question (inaudible) to think of grace that I've experienced as a catechist. In my community, I have young children whose peers have been coming through my class for a year, and I have to say that, now I'm not always fond of their parents. For one reason or another, we come across each other in the community, and when these kids come into my classroom, I mean I just can't... I can't judge them because of thoughts I have of something their parents said or did to me or whatever. I have to see these kids, you know, as my responsibility in faith and it gives me a path to have compassion and love for their parents as well. And so, you know, what I do is I talk to the kids about Mass. We've been learning about the Mass, and talking about the meaning of the Mass, and the fullness of the Mass, and what we should be getting from the Mass, so I try to impart that to the kids, and my hope and my prayer is that they might go home and say something to their parents about that and maybe get excited about coming, but I don't know if there's anything we can do to make the parents bring their kids to church...

Bishop: No, but I would say this: my experience has been that for many parents who are not active in the church for one reason or another, they don't feel comfortable in the church, they may not even feel they belong in the church. And they still love their children and they still love the church enough to entrust their children to us. And part of this reimagining of catechesis is to figure out, perhaps one person at a time, how to help them to heal, because we want them, right? We want them and we want to love them.

Speaker 6: I too don't have a question. (Inaudible) The kids are my inspiration. They love God. They absolutely love God, I've seen it. And they will also accept faith and reason together can coexist, they will accept that. Again, I've proven it. It's exciting for me, and I just can't wait to get there each week.

Bishop: Great. Thank you. Please.

Speaker 7: I've seen, because I have experiences with my younger brother, the youth of this generation have more of an independence rather than when I was younger growing up. I feel that if there's something that catches the eye, you will draw them. Because my younger brother talks to a lot of his friends, and when he speaks to them of the Church, of his own history and his experience, they kind of get drawn to the reality of the salvation that Christ had in his history. So I think the reality factor is what will draw the youth in. Because nowadays a kid will say, "Mom, I'm going here." Not "Can I go here?" It's "I'm going here." So if we as catechists kind of make a spark where we draw the youth to us rather than asking... You know, also being polite and asking the parents, but going out and drawing these children in who are hungry for this (inaudible) of something, because there's no meaning in their lives.

Bishop: You just describe what mission is, to go out to them and present the beauty, the fullness of who we are, and living it to attract them and say, "You found a home with us. Come with us." Yeah, exactly.

But I would say this: my classmate once said to me in philosophy class, in the back of the room... And I did pass philosophy by the way. (Laughter) One of my classmates who's now deceased wrote and he said, "Frank, remember,"—because we were getting berated by the professor—and he said, "Frank, remember, no one grows up voluntarily." (Laughter)

And I think there's a truth to that, meaning that, you know, unbridled liberty is a very dangerous place for anybody to walk. Right? And if they happen to be there, we have to kind of give them the hook, because, again to tell you my experience, my father loved the Lord, but because of an incident with the pastor, my father stopped going to mass from 1965 to 1987.

When I was ordained, he went back to Mass. Because he valued his life, my mother... (Laughter) And yet, God forbid, my sister and I did not go to mass. There was no discussion. And, you know, growing up in those days, I don't get my father angry, that's for sure. So my father helped me to grow up. And then he grew up, because by the time he died, my father was a daily communicant at Mass. Right? So that's the neutral witness we're talking about. Anyway. Other thoughts. Please Whose next?

Speaker 8: Question. Is this happening across the nation, or... ?

Bishop: The Diocese of Bridgeport is always at the cutting edge. (Laughter)

Yes, it is beginning. Let's me tell you why. I am the chairman of the subcommittee on the catechism at the USCCB, and that's a fancy way of saying the committee for the

catechism is the committee that reviews all of the catechetical material that is presented in the country that gets the seal of approval. There's a general consensus of the bishops of the committee, all the publishers of the country, that we're at a crossroads.

And let me give it to you real blunt. You can create the Mercedes of catechetical textbooks, and if the person who is using it doesn't know how to turn the car on, it's a useless piece of machinery. So the general consensus is... my first point. That we as a community now have to deepen our knowledge, awareness, love of the Lord, and for the community we form, so that whatever comes forward as a resource, we can unlock its potential. But that resource is only part of this path. This path here, because we have to engage in a whole new way the person in his fullness or her fullness.

Speaker 8: (Inaudible question about resources)

Bishop: They will eventually all be in the same place. But I think we are going to try to take the lead, to be honest, in our own way, and others are doing the same thing.

Speaker 8: And are you guys going to have guidelines... (inaudible)

Bishop: You mean the bishops of the country? We will see. But, you know, the truth is we have to learn from our experience, as in other places we learn from their experience, to be able to get to that point. We're years away from that point. No different than we're going to learn in our diocese. What works, what doesn't work, what may work here doesn't work there. Right? Other thoughts?

Speaker 9: (Inaudible) ... I have two boys, I could fortunately send them to Catholic school, Catholic university, and I've seen a lot of great leaders within the Catholic youth community, and part of that... (inaudible)... It also got me thinking: Do we have anything in place to get youth leaders involved, 8th graders, 9th graders, to maybe help make a connection and give the younger kids a closer step to aspire to... (inaudible)

Donovan: One of things we're going to announce in the next couple of months is a diocesan youth leadership team for just that purpose.

Bishop: Right, now why don't we just take two more?

Speaker 10: We were talking about the parents earlier. I've come to know some parents throughout the years, and some them, they don't even understand what their kids are learning in religious ed, and I teach 3rd grade. They have stopped their learning

at confirmation. Once they received confirmation, that was it, everything just ended. And I'm finding that—I'm raising grandchildren now—I am finding out with my grandchildren now to keep them involved. How do I keep them involved and learning after confirmation?

Bishop: Right. May I just say two things. First you raise grandparents. That's another key to this puzzle as the landscape changes, because many times grandparents are the transmitters of the faith in more effective ways than parents because the parents are not as knowledgeable, and they have had a different formation, right? So part of the mix here is, how do we unlock the potential of our grandparents who are here to help us with this? That's number one.

But the second is, I think, in the end, at least from my perspective, there is a way to catechize young people and their parents at the same time. Let me give you an example of what I mean. When I was the pastor of St. Dominic's in Bensonhurst, my very first Sunday, as I'm coming down the aisle, which was really short at St. Dominics, it was a multipurpose room—it was also the gym, church was the gym, it was a crazy set up—I decided we were having a family mass and didn't tell anybody. So I got on the altar and said, "By the way next week, we're going to make this a family mass." At the height of it we had almost 200 children there with their parents. OK. And I gave a homily—it's an infamous homily now—of... it was the two crowns, and all the kids would come up, and there were two bags. First bag was, you remember the Burger King crown? (Laughter)

"OK, who wants it?" "I want it! I want it!"

"Well, how come you want it?" Blah, blah, blah, all the reasons. I said, "But I have a better crown than this one. Who wants it?" "I want it! I want it!" I pull out a real crown of thorns. I said, "Now who wants that?"

Dead silence. I said in the congregation of parents, "Anybody here want it?" Dead silence. Now let's talk about why we don't want it and why it is what the Lord wore for us.

Well, let me tell you, kids got it. Parents got it. One woman came up to me after Mass crying. She said, "I will never ever look upon a cross, a crucifix, again the same way. Now I'm beginning to get it."

You see my point. So I'm not saying that's the end all, be all, but there are ways that when you literally instruct and engage young people, you're actually engaging

parents, provided they're in the same room, which is part of the reimagining. Right? How can we do that? OK. Last comment. Is there a last comment or question or...?

Speaker 11: I have a question. When you talk about engaging the mind and engaging the heart, we need to do both. Now I can sort of look back and say there was a generation that was engaged here but not here, and then I can there's a generation that's engaged here but not here. So, personally I think that in order, even today in catechesis I still get some that are focused here, some are focused here, and many are doing both. But I think it's helpful to have some certain guideline, because I'm getting more... it's like it keeps going. So now I'm getting people that are sort of turned off by this "all up in here" and want to focus only on here. But for me to come back and say, well, I think these are the ten things you really need to get through, and I know you're not big on memorization, or your not big on learning... (inaudible) but these things, if they really know them, and those few things that become rote memory, they sort of come here, and I find that in order to grow here, you need to grow here. And it's almost like a cycle, your heart goes on fire, your mind wants more. Your mind gets more, your heart gets more...

Bishop: Correct. Absolutely. OK, so now there's a great way to end my portion of the presentation. By saying goodnight everyone! (Laughter) No.

No, by giving you the ultimate challenge. If you put the map back up... Keep going... Keep going. One more. OK, stop right here. OK. So your insight is excellent because, my friends, they are, according to the Vatican, a one billion two hundred and sixty one million Catholics in the world. And there are one billion two hundred and sixty one million different places on that map.

And therefore, part of what I'm going to ask in the reimagining of catechesis is not simply to see this class as being homogeneous. But to your point, Jim may need more engagement of the mind, because you sense the heart is on fire. Some, the embers of the heart are a little dim, but that needs to be... And I'm going to tell you, every single one of you, myself included, where are you on this map?

I'll give you an example. You see the person who comes to church, comes to mass every Sunday. And God forbid you sit in their seat. (Laughter) And, when you get into the parking lot, God forbid you get in front of him. Right? You've met those people. OK. Where are they on that map?

Because they can answer the question, "Who do you say that I am?" But I wonder how that encounter with the Lord is growing. Or is this just religious observance? See, that's a caricature. Where are you and I on that map? Because your point is

absolutely correct. There is no one way to answer this. And memorization has a perfect role in this. We need to know the truths of our faith. But we need to know them while loving the truth of our faith, who is Jesus the Lord, right? So, can we ever imagine catechesis that could be that specific, that personalized, that we can accompany people on their map, because we all should get to the same destination. Totally different world. And we're going to try to figure out how we can do this. OK, my friends, one last...

Speaker 12: I teach 7th grade and... (inaudible)... I think we're asking them too little. As a mom, I will say that other moms spend at least four hours a week in some other activities...

Bishop: You mean as requirement?

Speaker 12: Right. We are not... (inaudible)

Bishop: OK. Let me ask you this. That could be part of it, absolutely, how we reimagine. So I'd be curious to see what response and what fruit comes from that. But just to give you a sense of the challenge. Evan, the average young person, how many hours are they in social media every week?

Evan: It could be up to 8 or 9 hours a day.

Speaker 12: I asked the children when they come in, how many hours do you spend sleeping, etc, and we put it on the board. And then, how many hours with God? And they are like, ooohh...

Bishop: Of course, because, again, I'm going to end with this point: You cannot force someone to love the one whom you love. You need to invite them. To require more hours would make sense if, on this path, they have already begun to have that fire start growing. Otherwise, they will rebel, because the truth is, if the fire begins to grow, they will want every opportunity you give them.

See, the bottom line is, in my estimation, given the landscape that I described, we have to become so compelling, so inviting, so truthful, so beautiful, so much convinced, that we are going to accompany the people entrusted to our care that they will voluntarily put their phone down and not use it 8 hours, because you gave them an opportunity to do more, and then they'll do it.

So, it's mission. My friends, we're going to do this. Thank you all. (Applause)