



Listening corresponds to the  
humble style of God.

**Pope Francis**



# 1. What does the word “catechesis” mean?

**The word catechesis** comes from the Greek *kat'echēin*. Within it, the term “echo” resonates; and in fact, everything begins with an “echoing”. In faith, something comes to us that humans do not draw from ourselves; this is the “revelation” or, as it has been said since Karl Rahner: “God’s self-communication”.

The image from acoustics leads directly to the depth of catechesis. **Faith comes from hearing** (Rom 10:17); it is reverberation, an echo of a message of joy. Catechesis ensures that in the heart of the individual person, as in the community of

the faithful, something resounds sustainably and permanently, wherein the accidentals of the world change: The world is not lost. God is faithful; in the incarnation of his Son, he makes the “very good” (Gen 1:18) of Genesis come true a second time – the Easter message of redemption from sin and death came into the world. And it concerns my biography; it is my chance at life.



As a young catechist, my job is to bring God’s message to young people in

different ways and through modern media, so that the echo also rises up in them, perhaps at a moment when they are not expecting it. Our job is to be an echo. We don’t have to be loud, but we have to be there.

**Maria Francis**, India

## 2. Catechesis of Jesus and from Jesus

The history of catechesis begins with Jesus himself, the **archetype and first among all catechists**. Jesus is all communication: “For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:37). He is the bearer of a message that concerns every human being: “I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.” (Jn 12:46) Jesus courts the open ears of his listeners: “Do you have ears, and fail to hear?” (Mark 8:18)

### 3. From the catechumenate to religious education

In the echo of Jesus, the Pentecostal Church grew, as also the number of those who wanted to be baptized. The fascinating story of the **Church of the Catechumenate** begins. Those who wanted to become Christians did not become so by a quick administrative act or an outward ritual. The *catechumens* (= candidates for baptism) went through a school of slowness, which often lasted for years. They not only received teaching (“baptismal catecheses”) but were initiated step by step into the mysteries of the faith, were “coached”, so to speak, and were allowed to approach by profession of faith and acts of assent. In approaching the Church, they had to take existential leave of the “futile way of life inherited from your forefathers” (1 Pet 1:18). Only then would they be able to see the Christian life as a personal encounter; only then would they encounter the paschal reality of Christ in baptism. Catechesis was an integral, life-changing process; one was sacramentally integrated into a Church that had not yet abandoned the claim to be a “new creation” (Gal 6:15).

In the post-Constantinian period, the dramatic turnings of life through which people came to faith diminished. One usually became a Christian by being born into a

Christian family. Catechesis became a conventional matter of transmission and gradually a part of regular education.

Now, *kat’echēin* can actually be translated as “to educate”, “to train,” or simply as “to teach”. The catechumenate, as a process of comprehensive integration into the faith, gave way to a **type of catechesis in the manner of a monological frontal event**, which led to all kinds of

misunderstandings and often resulted in pure indoctrination, in which little verifiable information was passed on with all the greater pressure. A “lesson” was given on a subject with a unique object.



Catechesis is an initiation into a friendship with Christ. It is a process of transformation and a lifelong conversion towards becoming a missionary disciple.

**Sr. Constance FMA**, Zambia

The target group was primarily children, who were taught about matters of faith at a certain point in their religious biography. Narrowed again by the Counter-Reformation, this meant: Those who were taught Christianity should, first of all, get a concept of the right Eucharistic faith, be able to recite the essential prayers, the ten commandments, and the five commandments of the Church by heart, receive the sacraments and be admonished to fulfill the Sunday duty. The effect of teaching was the formation of the “practicing Catholic”.





**Forced guests; having to participate as a thing in a sacred process in which not an ounce of my person could or would participate;** and this for eight years, morning after morning: this imprinted itself on the boy's life substance."<sup>42</sup>

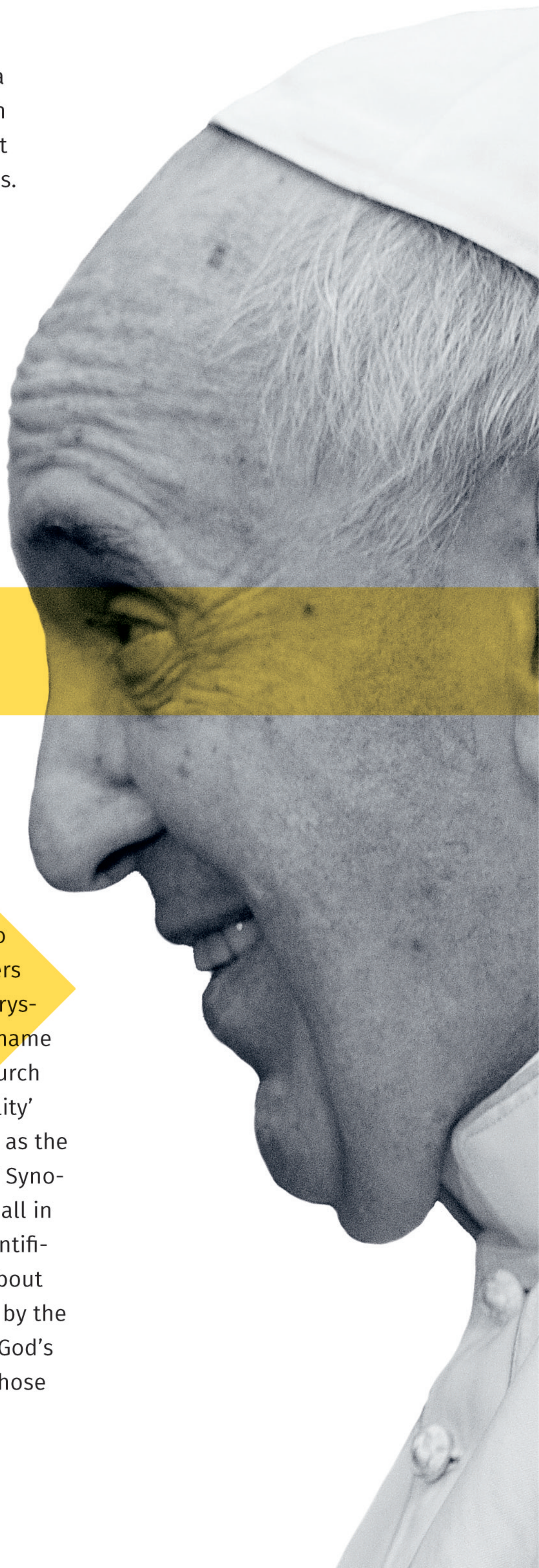
Catechesis, as "foreign devotion", leads to the opposite of faith: the withdrawal of trust and causes resentment that blocks all paths. In a Church that has to admit how fruitless an authoritarian and undialogical catechesis has become in many places, it made people sit up and take notice when Pope Francis addressed the young people at the end of the Roman Youth Synod: **"Forgive us if often we have not listened to you, if, instead of opening our hearts, we have filled your ears. As Christ's Church, we want to listen to you with love."**<sup>43</sup>

What happens in dialogue was described in detail by Martin Buber. Identity is created through dialogue. Anyone who has ever observed the development of a baby up close knows the moment when the baby smiles consciously at its mother. The little person becomes an "I" by finding a "you" and becoming one with him in the smile. Before, the child was completely absorbed in the symbiotic unity with the mother. Now it has an "I" – an identity awakened by love.

Martin Buber transfers this to human identity in general, saying: "I become through my relation to the Thou."<sup>44</sup> **We need the other to come fully to ourselves.** In the person opposite, we gain self-standing. What I am, I express before the Other. In sym-path $\acute{y}$ , we discover what we have in common. My beliefs are tested and modified in understanding or not understanding the Other.<sup>45</sup>

It is the same in the Church. We can live for a long time in a seemingly symbiotic unity with the Church, running along mindlessly without having our own identity as Catholic Christians. We live second hand, hide ourselves, do not want to be addressed in any way about our faith, declare it a private matter, and are only partially identified or not identified at all. We would have nothing to say, if someone would grill us, we could at best pass on: “Why don’t you ask a priest? He should know.”

This realization moved Pope Francis to once again focus on the idea of the new evangelization and declare **“synodality” a priority** of his pontificate. Pope Francis is in every way “strongly committed to promoting synodal processes and operations in the Catholic Church” because he is convinced that “resolutely following and deepening the path of synodality is ‘what God expects of the Church of the third millennium.’”<sup>46</sup> From the beginning, the Church understood itself as *syn’odos* – a common path. Christians who follow Christ as the Way were called “followers of the Way” (Acts 9:2). “In this sense, John Chrysostom was able to declare that ‘Church’ is a name ‘that stands for a common path’ and that Church and Synod are ‘synonyms’. The word ‘synodality’ is therefore just as ancient and fundamental as the word ‘Church’” Cardinal Kurt Koch explains.<sup>47</sup> Synodality means, first of all, the participation of all in the mission of the Church and its deeper identification in listening to the Word of God. It is about overcoming an ecclesial type best described by the term “Church of dependents” – a division of God’s people into those who are responsible and those who are dependent.



## ANNEX TTT 10



### The Tandem Principle

The Tandem Principle is one of the most important construction principle of discipleship. Disciples are called and sent by Jesus. Jesus calls the disciples one by one. However, he sends them in pairs

“Now after this the Lord appointed seventy-two others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come.”

The remarkable thing about Luke 10:1 is the second clause: “... into which He Himself wanted to go”. This means:

- ▶ Mission is **preparation** for what Jesus Himself wants to do and can only do alone. This is the first major relief.
- ▶ The second relief is: From the very beginning, Jesus breaks the misery of being **alone** on mission. He makes it a companion’s mission to be accomplished in friendship. Mission, then, is a collaborative task, a tandem job.
- ▶ Two stands for **at least two**.
- ▶ The “other” can be, for example, the best friend; but it can also be someone only I know is burning for the same ideal, the same dream: Bringing Jesus to the people.
- ▶ One takes the initiative: “Shouldn’t we work together ...? Alone, I lack the strength, I lack the ideas, I lack the time!”
- ▶ If you have decided to do something beautiful for God and people in two or three, first go to prayer to gain assurance that what you are planning is pleasing to the Lord – and that you will be gifted with strength and gifts.



### What you can do missionary in “Tandem“:

- ▶ **Two** read the Acts of the Apostles with each other and let themselves be inspired by the Holy Scripture and by the Spirit of God as to what they could do to bear witness to their faith.
- ▶ **Two** start a prayer group together to revive their parish or community.
- ▶ **Two** invite young people to go to a spiritual event with them.
- ▶ **Two** organize a “Nightfever” (<https://nightfever.org/>) or other form of worship.
- ▶ **Two** organize a YOUCAT Study Group or an *Alpha Course*.
- ▶ **Two** organize a “faith camp” with friends (50% vacation / 50% training in Bible and catechesis).
- ▶ **Two** make a video clip with Christian content.
- ▶ **Two** ...

In tandem, there are endless opportunities to do something for God and people. The important thing is that “mission” happens in community and leads to new community.

A story about Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross demonstrates **what can be accomplished in community for the Kingdom of God**. After her conversion in 1554, Teresa, not the youngest and ill, was full of zeal for action. Her (younger) spiritual companion John of the Cross, was deeply frightened by her incredible

dynamism: “Teresa, remember, you are alone!” Teresa countered: “If you go with me, there will be two of us!” The history of the Church knows several examples where something started by a connection of two people, e.g. Benedict of Nursia and his sister Scholastica, Francis and Clara of Assisi or Francis de Sales and Jane Frances de Chantal. From Philip Neri, the amazing dictum is transmitted:

“Give me ten selfless people, that is enough for me to convert the whole world with them.”

