



Living the Faith Step 5

Creation is our starting point - *Fr Elio Capra SDB re Pope Francis & Laudato Si* *notes from input given at RCIA National Conference, Melbourne, October 2018*

Fr Elio stressed how from the start of his pontificate Pope Francis has been keen to give a new face and new direction to the Church. While that is likely to be a long journey, Francis is in for the long haul.

Laudato Si, the Pope's only true encyclical, contains the heart and soul of the task of changing the face of the Church. Whenever the Pope talks about a seemingly controversial topic, he quotes both Thomas Aquinas and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, giving a clear sign that he is backing the wisdom and authority of Catholic Tradition.

Fr Elio stressed the importance of Catechesis beginning not with the Ministry of Jesus, but with the story of creation. The symbolic narrative which contains profound teachings about the human existence and the historical reality in which all life is grounded: our relationship with God, neighbour, and the earth. When divisions appear amongst these three things, the world begins to fall apart.

Divisions are generally the result of sin which, Fr Elio claims, occurs when we make ourselves **'little Gods'** people who want to be the centre of attention. Doing this puts God out of the picture. Too full of their own importance, individuals then become selfish and greedy, beginning to destroy not just themselves, but the created world around us. As humans we are therefore capable of wiping out those who are not like us – but in doing so we create chaos. The first to suffer are always the poor. Human selfishness returns humanity to the void; the chaos and darkness that existed before God created the world.

God, as creator, is in all things. The breath of God is present in each of us, we are impregnated with his spirit and share the DNA of Jesus. Like him we too are both human and divine. The incarnation, the coming of Jesus into the world heralded in a new stage of evolution through which transformation takes place. The more we open ourselves to God, the more divine we will become, and so the more complete, in our relationship with God, with each other and with the world.

The Mission of Jesus, the God of the incarnation, was to turn towards the world in creative love, redemptive healing and transforming power. This turning point in history is not confined to the activity of the Church. All people are called to be witnesses of God's transforming love. In order to participate in God's Mission we, individually and as Church, must recognise and listen, and so discern the work of God around us. It is an encounter with mystery. We must help people to be open to God in every aspect of their lives, encouraging them to contemplate and to engage. The Mission of the Church, in service of the Kingdom of God, has three essential, inter-related dimensions: Human Liberation, Inculturation and Inter-Religious Dialogue. The Second Vatican Council made clear the importance of these dimensions, offering direction and purpose in how to engage more fully with each. The canonisation of Archbishop Romero, (October 2018), who gave his life in the fight for human liberation, again highlights the importance Pope Francis gives to this dimension of Church Mission.

The understanding of Mission expressed above must impact on our approach to Catechesis.

1 - Our approach must offer **incarnational catechesis**. We are called to be Missionary Disciples, people who are prepared to:

- **enter** into the lives of those amongst whom we live, and those with whom we journey through the RCIA process
- **experience** the daily struggles others face
- **share** in their pain and suffering, their joy and celebration
- get **in touch** with their experiences of God
- **discover** some of the myriad of ways that God's spirit is already at work within them – even though they may be unwilling, or unable, to recognise this

2 - Our approach must demonstrate an **incarnational methodology** evidenced by our actions. In his exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel' Pope Francis tells us the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who truly encounter Jesus and are prepared to do God's will. Those who accept the offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness or loneliness. With Christ we are constantly being born anew; able to cope with the most difficult of life's circumstances.

3 - Our approach must include **incarnational content**, centred on the person of Jesus and the Gospel message. The starting point is that Jesus loves each one of us, he gave his life for us, and is at our side each day to enlighten us. The message is one we need to hear again and again, in different ways during the many different moments of our life. We are creating Missionary Disciples, Christ centred individuals who are willing to be the hands and feet of God in the world today. We must go out into the world. In parallel with the parable of the lost sheep, to stay at home and tend to the one remaining member of our flock, rather than go out and look for the other 99 that have strayed is mindless folly, and not the witness we are called to give.