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## Chapter 4

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# GOD'S PEDAGOGY IS INCARNATIONAL

### Unity of Words and Deeds

AS THE OLD CLICHÉ GOES, "Actions speak louder than words." Certainly, in our contemporary culture, we want to see words backed up by action if we are to believe what the words say. If the words and actions don't go together, we call it hypocritical.

The Vatican II *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, known by its Latin name *Dei Verbum*, points out the "inner unity" of deeds and words in God's plan of revelation: "The deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them" (2). From speaking the universe into existence, to his promise to Noah and his covenants with Abraham and Moses, to the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ, it is evident that God's word becomes action.

God wants that same unity of words and deeds to be expressed in the lives of each Christian. Through our baptism, we have put on Christ. We have been baptized into his death and raised with him to new life. Yet, as Saint Paul says, this new life is Christ living in us. Therefore, although the Law of Moses, which was fulfilled in Christ, no longer binds us, we still have responsibility as disciples of Christ — the responsibility to put our faith into action. It is God's grace, received through faith, that saves us. Yet, this is not "cheap grace," as the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it in *The Cost of Discipleship* (first published in 1937), in which we understand God's grace to mean his unconditional mercy and forgiveness, and then assume that we have no responsibility whatsoever. Rather, Scripture tells us, "faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas 2:17).

The Christian community is called to continue Christ's unity of words and deeds by providing a "living catechesis" (*GDC*, 141). We have especially recognized the great example that is given to us in the saints, who allowed God's word to take root in their lives and produce heroic Christian virtue. We are called to cooperate with the grace God gives us, a grace that enables us to follow Christ and live as the people God made us to be. This *spirituality of discipleship* is especially important in the lives of catechists, who are called not only to be disciples, but also to "make disciples" (Mt 28:19).

Speaking about the Eucharist, Saint Augustine taught his followers: "Receive what you are. Become what you receive." As Christians, we are all parts of the Body of Christ, and as we receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, we are called to form ourselves more and more to the image of Christ in our everyday actions. God forms us by allowing us to grow in holy action through his gift of sanctifying grace, "a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with

God, to act by his love" (*Catechism*, 2000). If we have authentic faith and are responding to God's grace, good works will grow in our lives. In the previously quoted passage from James, he goes on to say the following:

Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works. (2:17-18)

God's Holy Spirit, dwelling within the hearts of the faithful, serves as pedagogue, instructing the Christian in the ways of God, and the gifts of the Spirit bear visible fruits: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (see *Catechism*, 1832; Gal 5:22-23).

### **A Pedagogy of the Senses**

God desires to enter into relationship with humanity. From the very beginning of time, he has revealed himself to men and women in a variety of ways. *Dei Verbum* states that God "gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities" (3). Saint Paul points out that God reveals himself in creation itself: "Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made" (Rom 1:20). Jesus himself taught not only through words, but also through his healings and other miracles, and his compassionate example as he cared for the poor and marginalized.

As he taught about God's kingdom, Jesus frequently cited visible illustrations of what he was teaching. For example, on an occasion when he was teaching his disciples about humility, he brought a small child for them to see as an example of what God wants us, spiritually, to be (see Mt 18:1-6). Jesus was a keen observer of his environment, and he watched for concrete examples of the principles he wanted his disciples to live.

Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making Himself present and manifesting Himself: through His words and deeds, His signs and wonders, but especially through His death and glorious resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth. (*Dei Verbum*, 4)

Early Christian teachers followed Christ's example of multi-sensory methodology. Saint Paul, for example, taught both by preaching and the written word. He also used visual aids at times to engage his listeners — for example, the previously mentioned altar to an "Unknown God" (Acts 17:23). The Church continued a tradition of multi-sensory methodology, developing the signs of sacramental rites as well as using music and the visual arts to tell the Gospel story. The Church has enjoyed a rich history of painting, sculpture, music, and dramatic arts. Masterpieces like the works of Michelangelo testify to the importance that has been placed on this multi-sensory tradition. In recent decades, Catholic films and television programs have been produced to teach others about the faith. In Mass today (particularly on feast days), we might have the opportunity to smell incense, hear music, view beautiful icons and stained-glass windows, move into various prayer postures — for example, kneeling and standing — and even taste Jesus as we receive the Host and chalice.

## **Christocentric**

The unity of God's words and deeds, the Incarnation of his revelation, is seen most fully in the person of Jesus Christ. "In these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word" (Heb 1:2-3). As Willey (2009) points out, Christ himself, on the road to Emmaus, explains "how all of the Scriptures have reference to Christ and find their fulfillment in him."

Everything God had to teach us, everything he wanted to say, was fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

### **Questions for Reflection**

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- How has God revealed himself to you through your senses? What have you seen and experienced through Creation that speaks of the mystery and power of God?
- How does the Church today continue to use multi-sensory methodology to teach the truth of God and make us aware of his presence?
- In what way is Jesus Christ the "fullness of God's revelation" to humankind?