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## **The Word of God and Catechesis**

In this month's issue of *The Sivach* we continue with our meditation on "The Word of God" – the first of six key elements of a vibrant parish, outlined in His Beatitude Sviatoslav's Pastoral Letter: "The Vibrant Parish – a Place to Encounter the Living Christ". Last month we dwelt a bit upon *lectio divina*, the art of reading and listening to the Word of God as it is contained in Holy Scripture. Today we will examine the other side of the coin, that is, having been enlightened by the Word of God, how we are called to proclaim this Word to the world – Catechesis.

The Word of God and Catechesis make up what we call the Prophetic Mission of the Church – a 'prophetic' mission because it has its roots in the actions of the prophets of the Old Testament. In order to understand our own prophetic and teaching ministry in the contemporary Church, we must first examine the role of the prophets in the life of the Israelite community in which they lived so long ago.

When we think of the prophets of the Old Testament we usually think of men chosen by God, who possessed the gift of foretelling the future. The famous prophecy of Isaiah regarding the virgin birth of the Messiah immediately comes to mind: "...the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son and shall name him Immanuel." (Is. 7:14) The fact that some Old Testament prophets foretold the future is indeed true, but they played a much broader role in the society in which they lived.

For one thing, the prophets profoundly felt the presence of God in their lives, which was closely connected to their fundamental mission: to listen to and proclaim the word of God. Very often these were words of judgment and warning to the Israelites, especially when they strayed from the path of righteousness, but they were also words of renewal, hope and instruction in faithfulness to God. Biblical tradition acknowledges them as spokesmen of God and this is why their words were recorded for future generations in Holy Scripture.

Later on in salvation history, when we read the various miracles, parables and sermons of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels we see in them examples of Jesus fulfilling his own prophetic/teaching ministry. Here he acts, not as a spokesman for God like the prophets, but as the Son of God himself, speaking with complete authority in his own right, directly to us without using an intermediary.

Finally, we ourselves, as contemporary disciples of Jesus are called to preach the Good News of his Life, Death and Resurrection, each in our own way, mainly with the example of our lives, to those around us and to succeeding generations of disciples. As Jesus tells us: "No disciple is above his teacher. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher." (Mt. 10:24-5) This means that the prophetic/teaching ministry of the prophets in the Old Testament and of Jesus in the Gospels is also OUR mission and calling: to hear the Word of God and to allow it to transfigure our lives in order that we may pass on that Word to others.

Therefore, if we seriously desire that our parishes be truly places to encounter the living Christ, then Catechesis – the teaching and passing on of the Faith – must have a central place in parish life. And for this to take place a catechism text written specifically for the needs of our Ukrainian Catholic faithful is essential.

Why is our own specific catechism such a necessity, especially when we have at our disposal texts such as the monumental and excellent Catechism of the Catholic Church of Blessed Pope John Paul II, this year celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its publication, which has been translated into all the major world languages, including Ukrainian?

This is true, but there are two events in the recent history of the Ukrainian Catholic Church that have underlined the need for our own catechism. The first was the celebration of the Millennium of Christianity in Rus-Ukraine in 1988 and the second was the re-emergence of our Church in Ukraine, 20 years ago, from the years of suppression and persecution.

With the first we proved that we are a Church that has, in a sense, 'come of age', that we are the possessors and stewards of a unique, venerable and holy ecclesiastical and spiritual tradition that has spread throughout the world from its beginnings in the Baptism by Volodymyr of his nation in the Dnipro River a thousand years ago. With the second we have demonstrated that we are a growing, relevant and dynamic Church, ready to take our rightful place in modern Ukrainian society and wherever in the world our faithful and our institutions are present. In short, having our own catechism is a crucial part of our self-realization and self-identification as a Church.

Cardinal Lubomyr Husar, shortly after being elected as Head and Father of the Ukrainian Catholic

Church in 2001 specifically emphasized the need of such a publication in the following words: “The teaching of Christ is one and the same for all, the faith of Christ is also the same for all Catholics regardless of their rite or their belonging to one or other local church. Rather, theological understanding of the truths revealed by God can be different in different cultures, as there are different liturgical rites”.

With this in mind, the Synod of Ukrainian Catholic Bishops formally resolved over a decade ago, to write and publish a catechism text specifically for the faithful of our Church. A special catechetical commission was formed, under the leadership of Bishop Peter Stasiuk, with the task of assembling a team of Ukrainian Catholic theologians and scholars to produce a suitable text. The result - “Christ – Our Pasch” – was officially launched in the Ukrainian-language original, a year ago. It contains many beautiful color plates of Ukrainian icons and is filled with citations from Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, including numerous ones taken from the writings of the Servant of God, Metropolitan Sheptycky.

His Beatitude Sviatoslav, in his observations at the time the Catechism was launched in Kyiv, noted that the Ukrainian Catholic Catechism would promote a better understanding of our proper Christian roots would aid the faithful in rediscovering their own identity in a modern world marked by processes of globalization and assimilation. At the same time, it would contribute to a better understanding of the universal significance of our tradition. “The current situation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine as well as abroad, the needs of the faithful of our Church define the goal of the Catechism – to help the faithful to better understand and implement more profoundly in their lives the Christian faith transmitted to us by the Fathers of our Church; to cherish our Kyivan Christian Tradition; and in their light to find responses to the challenges of modern world,” he said.

“Christ – Our Pasch” is currently being translated into several major European languages used by Ukrainian Catholic faithful around the world including Portuguese, Spanish and Russian. An English translation is expected to appear in print by the summer of 2013. Along with a copy of the Holy Scriptures, our new Ukrainian Catholic Catechism should be present and read in each of our homes. What a beautiful Christmas present for a loved one! Have anyone in mind?