

My friends in Christ, we are now two months into the Parochial Year for Evangelization, a year *hopefully* that has already begun to enlighten our minds, enflame our souls, and inspire our lives to be active and intentional disciples of Jesus Christ, thus to be made even stronger and even more effective in our every effort to proclaim the Gospel and evangelize the nations. As I mentioned on the Solemnity of Christ the King eight weeks ago, to become *evangelists*, we must first *be* evangelized and thus become *disciples*. Through Advent and through the Christmas season, we have focused on discipleship in preparation for becoming evangelists; today, we conclude this theme of discipleship.

The Second Vatican Council teaches us that – by virtue of our Baptism – every Christian is summoned to the universal call to holiness; and the call to *holiness*...is the call to *discipleship*. For we are made holy by sheer gift – the gift of God’s grace – and we ought never to hide this gift under a bushel basket; we ought rather to *share* this gift with others. Letting ourselves be made holy by the gift of God’s grace and then *sharing* that gift with others: *that* is the call to holiness...*that* is the call of the disciple.... But before we can go forth to *share* Christ with others, we first must *receive* Christ ourselves – for we cannot *give* what we do not yet *have*...and we cannot even *have* that which we do not know even *can* be had. In our summons to holiness...that call to discipleship...we *give*, and we *share*...but that all begins with: we *receive*. And in order to *receive* the Lord, we must first of all *know* the Lord. Discipleship begins with *knowing* Jesus, *thus* to receive Him, *thus* to share Him with other people; we strive first of all to *be* disciples of Jesus Christ, that we may then go about the good and holy work of *doing* discipleship.

And so, to begin: *knowing* Jesus. Not knowing *about* Jesus; not friending Him on Facebook so that we can flood our brains with hundreds and thousands of little factoids *about* Him – what He likes eating for dessert and all of the rest of that Facebook drivel! But actually *knowing* Him.... How do we do *that*? How can we actually *know* Him? We consider the truth that Jesus...is the *Word*...of God. And the Word of God is conveniently written down for us, printed and bound in book-form, and we call that “the Bible.” In Sacred Scripture, Christ can be known. Saint Jerome famously tells us that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ Himself. So we retrieve our Bibles from those dark confines of the attic or the basement, we blow off the years of dust, we crack open that sacred book – ever ancient yet ever new – and we can read it. And even more, we can *pray* with it. Have a

prayer request for God? Offer that prayer, and then read some Scripture to discover how God wills to hear and answer your prayer through the Word of God in Sacred Scripture, the Word Who is the Father's Son.

We consider how we can know Jesus in the Scripture texts that are given us for Mass today; in the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses proclaims to the Chosen People of Israel: “a prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to Him shall you listen.” This forthcoming prophet like Moses is Jesus Christ – Jesus Christ: Priest, *Prophet*, and King. A prophet proclaims the Word of God most faithfully, most prudently, most perfectly; totally, whole-heartedly aligned and in perfect conformity with the most holy will of God our Father Who art in Heaven. A prophet proclaims the Word of God; Jesus, then, is *the* Prophet because He *is* the Word of God! So already, even in the *Old* Testament, we begin to know Who Jesus is, for even *thousands* of years prior to His Incarnation, the Lord already was making Himself known through Moses and the prophets.

And then in the *New* Testament, particularly in the Gospel narratives, Jesus Christ of course is made known to us even further; in today's Gospel text from Saint Mark, not only is Jesus making Himself known to us – as “one having authority,” as Teacher and Healer – but ironically enough, it is the demon which He casts out that *also* make Him known to us. One might suppose that the *last* thing that the devil wants is for Jesus Christ to be made known precisely for Who He truly is – and yet, the devil's very own worthless minion is right there blabbing the great Messianic secret: “Jesus of Nazareth...the Holy One of God.”

The angels and archangels – counter to the demons in every single way, *except* that they, too, proclaim for us Who Jesus is. At the famous Annunciation, the Gospel text of which we heard way back on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent, there is much about Jesus Christ that is made known to us by the Archangel Gabriel: He is great; He is holy; He is the Son of God, Son of the Most High; He is heir to the throne of King David; He is ruler of the House of Jacob – King of a Kingdom that will have no end.

But whereas *earthly* kings tend to *take...this* King – *Christ* the King – is a king Who *gives*. His supreme love for us is made manifest in that He is a Giver of great gifts. And what is His *greatest* of *all* of His gifts? His very *Self*. In the manger, He is all there – His *whole* Self – given to us as a small,

helpless, defenseless Baby, utterly dependent on all others for protection. And on the Cross, again, He is all there, offering to us His complete and total gift of Self, even unto death, yet again helpless, yet again defenseless, yet again naked (and bleeding and dying this time in His own *undying* love for us). And in the Eucharist – think about that! When we are given Him in the Eucharist, He is *totally* helpless! Not unlike when He gave Himself to us as a small, shivering Baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger; and not unlike when He submitted Himself to the savage brutality of the Romans and the Jews to be nailed to that Cross and left hanging there to die. Just so, in the Eucharist, once again – and at every single Mass – He is totally helpless. What He wants is that we would consume Him, worthily and well, in the state of grace; yet He knows that He is helpless and that we can do what we want with Him: chew Him up, spit Him out, feed Him to the birds.... He gives of Himself so helplessly because He loves us and wants us to receive Him. And by the grace of God and in our humility of heart, we *will* receive Him; we will be given Him, fully prepared and properly disposed to receive Him as He *Himself wills* to be given and *wants* to be received: in good standing with the Church...in the state of grace...worthily and well.

And so in Sacred Scripture, we know Him; and in the Mass, in the Eucharist, we know Him.

How else can we know Him? How else can we *receive* Him – receive Him in *spirit*? There is the Eucharist *again*: Eucharistic Adoration. Here at Saint Peter, we have a stronger, a more vibrant culture of Eucharistic Adoration probably than any other parish in the city – maybe even the whole diocese (except for Saint Thomas More, which enjoys *perpetual* Adoration). As we know, we started the Season of Advent by hosting seven days of around-the-clock Eucharistic Adoration, and lots of people have been asking when we can do it again! Our regular parish schedule has Adoration every Tuesday from noon to 6 PM, every Friday from 6 PM to 7 PM (during which time I am available to hear confessions), and on first Saturdays each month (during which time we pray the Rosary). And in the days ahead, there will be many *other* opportunities to adore Our Lord in the Eucharist.

I mentioned the Rosary just now; we can also get to know Jesus more when we know *Mary* more, and we can know *her* more when we pray that most treasured Marian prayer, the Rosary. To know the *Mother* is – *through* the Mother – to know her *Son*.

And so, we strive to *know* Jesus, thus to *receive* Jesus. And in receiving Christ Himself, we in turn are thus made fully Christian, and *being* Christian is the *next* step toward *being* active, intentional disciples of Jesus Christ, that we may then *do* the good and holy work of Christian discipleship.

Being Christian, then. We consider the Eucharist – the Source and Summit of our Catholic Christian faith, conferred for us in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We come to Mass every Sunday, and yes, we can check Mass off our to-do list. We came to church, we participated in the Mass, we gave glory to God, our divine praises and all that is truly sublime (please God); and in so doing, we received grace in abundance – grace upon grace – simply in being here – *especially* if we received the Lord in the Eucharist worthily and well, as I mentioned before.... And then, the Mass is ended; go forth – and forth, we go; and we check Mass off our list.... But we *cannot*, we *must* not check *Jesus* off our list! Always and everywhere – each day and every moment – we *praise* God, we *thank* God, we strive to be in *conversation* with God. (Or anyway, such at least is my *hope* for what we are doing for God outside of the Mass.) And *how* can do all of this? Archbishop Fulton Sheen called it: the heroic moment!

Sanctify each moment – or rather, let it *be* sanctified by the Lord. Even the most mundane things. Jesus preached about taxes – boom, taxes were sanctified. Jesus made a whip out of cords and drove out the moneychangers – boom, clearing out the riff-raff was sanctified. After He gave bread and fish to the vast multitudes, His disciples gathered all of the fragments left over – boom, taking out the trash was sanctified. And we also can let such mundane moments (even taking out the trash!) be sanctified if, for example, we give thanks to God for the simple fact that we live in a part of the world where there even *is* a trash pick-up service. Let *each* moment be a *heroic* moment; let each moment be sanctified – no matter how graced, no matter how mundane.

And thus we will find our lives more deeply, fully, truly Christian; thus will we come, more and more, to *receive* Jesus – He Whom we strive to know...He Whom we so love and so adore.

And thus is our answer to the universal call to holiness – our response to the summons to being active and intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.... May it be that we pursue this path toward our salvation, that we answer and respond to that call to discipleship, so that in *knowing* Jesus, and

thereby in *receiving* Jesus, we would then strive to *share* Jesus with others...winning souls for Christ with our living and proclaiming the Gospel of salvation, and *all* of it for the greater glory of God.