
LET US WELCOME AND KNOW JESUS



Through our parents, godparents, and the entire Church, at baptism we welcomed Jesus in our lives; rather, it would be better to say that it was Jesus himself who welcomed us as members of his own body. At our baptism we were reborn to a new life, the life of Jesus, and we were made members of the Church. Day after day we must remember what we have become through the grace of God. « Christian, be aware of your dignity, » insisted Pope St. Leo the Great. Day after day we must discover more and more who Jesus is and what is the main message he has brought us.

MASTER OF HUMANKIND

The profession of faith made before tens of thousands of Filipinos, at Manila in 1970 by Pope Paul VI, is to me most refreshing and uplifting. He declared: *"Jesus is Christ, the Son of the living God. Because of him we come to know the God we cannot see. He is the firstborn of all creation; in him all things find their being. Man's teacher and redeemer, he was born for us, died for us, and for us he rose from the dead. All things, all history converges in Christ. A man of sorrow and hope, he knows us and loves us. As our friend he stays by us throughout our lives; at the end of time he will come to be our judge; but we also know that he will be the complete fulfilment of our lives and our great happiness for all eternity."*

OUR BROTHER

Pope Paul continues: *"I can never cease to speak of Christ for he is our truth and our light: he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is our bread, our source of living water who allays our hunger and satisfies our thirst. He is our shepherd, our leader, our ideal, our comforter and our brother. He is like us but more perfectly human, simple, poor, humble, and yet, while burdened with work, he is more patient. He spoke on our behalf; he worked miracles; and he founded a new kingdom: in it the poor are happy; peace is the foundation of a life in common; where the pure of heart and those who mourn are uplifted and comforted; the hungry find justice; sinners are forgiven; and all discover they are brothers."*

SON OF GOD, SON OF MARY

He ended his profession of faith by proclaiming: *"The image I present to you is the image of Jesus Christ... So once again I repeat his name to you Christians and I proclaim to all men: Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, Lord of the new universe, the great hidden key to human history and the part we play in it. He is the mediator - the bridge, if you will - between heaven and earth. Above all he is the Son of man, more perfect than any man, being also the Son of God, eternal and infinite. He is the son of Mary his mother on earth, more blessed than any woman. She is also our mother in the spiritual communion of the mystical body. Remember: It is Jesus Christ I preach day in and day out. His name I would see echo and reecho for all time even to the ends of the earth."* ["Homily Given at Manila," November 29, 1970. In: *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Volume III. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1975, pages 418-419]

THE MISUNDERSTOOD CHRIST

Is Jesus Christ for most of us *"the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of humanity, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfilment of all aspirations,"* as the Fathers of Vatican II ["Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*," in: Austin Flannery, O.P., Gen. Ed., *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents... in Inclusive Language*. Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996. No, 45, p. 216] described him? Despite the incalculable number of books and magazines on Jesus, despite the countless thousands of sermons preached and religion classes given, despite the saints and the martyrs, Jesus is not yet known by everyone. Despite our saying « Year 2000 » as a reference to the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God still goes unrecognised.

MISUNDERSTOOD IN OUR MILIEUS

We do not have to go far to confirm this. In our own milieus we do not always find a lively faith in Christ Jesus, true God and true man. Without always being aware of it, we live in an ever increasing secular society, with no major reference to religion. While in the not-too-distant past we could pray to and talk of God both at home and in school, this is not always the case, today. Parents and grandparents dare no longer speak of Jesus or call to prayer. [In schools where religious education is part of the curriculum,] the time allotted has been so reduced year after year that there is very little talk of Jesus, any more. And when 60% and more of our Christian population no longer attend church regularly for the Sunday gathering, it is not surprising that Jesus and his message are misunderstood.

PASSING ON OUR HERITAGE

It is not my intention to accuse or blame anyone for this new reality in our milieus; I am only trying to explain to myself this misunderstanding of our faith, this ignorance of Jesus. During my pastoral visits I met many 10-year olds who knew neither the prayer of Jesus nor the sign of the cross. How then can one live of the life of Jesus and according to his teaching? Isn't the mission we received at baptism and confirmation to pass on what we have received, *"by teaching them to observe everything that the Lord has commanded"* (Mt. 28:20) and by realising that he is always there with us? The phenomenon of secularisation brings home to us that the Gospel proclamation is not reserved for foreign countries. Today, in our own homes, around the table, the believing brother can meet an unbelieving brother; in school, the young Christian can meet schoolmates who are curious about his being baptised and his sharing in the life of the Church; in the workplace, the Christian can be differentiated from others by his or her way of being and acting.

LET US LEARN TO BE « CHURCH »

It is an extraordinary grace to discover Jesus and his life-giving message. It is as great a grace for us as it was for the woman at the well when Jesus met her: *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water"* (Jn. 4:10). I pray that each and everyone of you have such an experience, that you, too, encounter Jesus, the Son of the Living God. It will be an overwhelming experience which will affect your entire life. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, you will be confirmed in your faith and you will be able to tell those around you: *"It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have seen for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world"* (Jn. 4:42).

AN ENCOUNTER THAT AFFECTS US

This experience of Jesus the Saviour is a determining one for each person and for the Church as a whole. Pope John Paul II's exhortation to the faithful gathered at Mexico City on January 22, 1999, primarily considers this encounter with the Living Christ who is the way of conversion, communion, and solidarity. The Church is the assembly of those who have had this Jesus experience, of those who have met him, who believe in him, hope in him and live in his love. It is much more than an emotional experience: it is an experience of faith and in faith. Baptised in the faith of the Church, in the faith of our parents, we gradually discover a Jesus who shows himself to our hearts. Formed in the life of Jesus, we are called to see with his eyes and listen with his ears, to love, pray, and forgive like him.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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