

**Homily**  
**Christ Our Life**  
**Sunday, September 25, 2016**

My good friends:

In his Easter Vigil Homily on April 19, 2014, Pope Francis cited verses from the Gospel of Matthew instructing the women who had come to the tomb of Jesus to minister to his body. Surprisingly they encountered an empty tomb.

A mighty angel said to them: “Do not be afraid” (Mt. 28:5) and orders them to go and tell the disciples: “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee.” (v. 7) The women quickly depart. On the way Jesus himself meets them and says: “Do not fear; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (v. 10)

Pope Francis observed: “Galilee is the place where they were first called, where everything began! To return there, to return to the place where they were originally called. Jesus had walked along the shores of the lake as the fishermen were casting their nets. He had called them, and they left everything and followed him. (cf: Mt. 4-18-22).”

“For each of us, there is a “Galilee” at the origin of our journey with Jesus. . . . to return to Galilee means above all to return to that blazing light with which God’s grace touched me at the start of the journey.”

The title of our conference: “Christ Our Life” speaks to the fact that indeed it is this Jesus who is at the core of whom we are. Like the Apostles, it is the relationship with him that gives meaning to our existence, our purpose in life.

Can you recall your Galilee? When did Jesus touch you in an irresistible manner that you could not help but follow him? For me, it was in my early seminary years, when so very vulnerable to the outreach of love, I could not put off that which prevailed in spite of the allurements of a glistening world. As is the case, so often, love triumphed. It was the love of Jesus.

From these early moments of intimacy there evolved a lifelong friendship during which I have grown more and more aware of the nature of who this Christ is. It led to affirmation and a formulation into statements through the study of theology communicating objectively what the divine reality is. But, like the Apostles, what remained primary, always controlling my life-decisions, was the connection, the union, the oneness that I experienced with Christ on the personal level. This sustained the relationship in all circumstances, nourishing it and enabling it to mature.

When we have an interest, something that sparks our action, we always want to get more into that reality whether it be a relationship or a passion. There is a thirst which cannot be quenched.

Isn’t that what we are about here at Christ Our Life? Hasn’t the Lord Jesus encountered us in our own Galilee? Now, representing all ages, sizes and shapes, we gather in pursuit of our

further understanding of who Christ is. We are eager to experience more of His revelation, to complete the picture, to satisfy our deep curiosity, our longing.

Among other presentations, that is why we were struck with and heard Father Michael Schmitz “Sharing the relationship with Jesus is not optional. . . . You don’t have to be a person with all the answers to share Jesus.”

Jesse Romero: “I want to fill the Catholic Churches with young men.” “Real men pray.”

Deacon Alex Jones “Even if it comes to a matter of giving up everything, I must act.”

Being in a large crowd has a unique impact on us. In numbers, we find strength. At World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland, there were a million and a half young people pulled by the attraction of the living Christ. They were magnetized by the huge numbers and the remarkable diversity of hearts that Jesus touches world-wide.

The same is true of the Meeting of Families in Philadelphia when Pope Francis visited the U.S. last fall. As a matter of fact, the nation incredibly paused in its tracks for four days as the media focused exclusively on this Successor of Peter who spelled out the meaning of Jesus in terms of our relationships with one another. It was remarkable how time halted enabling us to listen to the voice of Jesus, in unison, in our era dominated by the secular.

Hardly a day goes by when I don’t hear recalled the visit of Pope John Paul II to Iowa and Living History Farms on October 4, 1979. The biggest crowd ever assembled in Iowa history, some 350,000 gathered on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi to acknowledge how important God is and to be united in one chorus of prayer with the successor of Peter. The memory etched in the imagination of so many still has impact. Human nature wants to be in harmony, to be among huge gatherings of brothers and sisters joining in one spirit. Thus, we gather at Wells Fargo, at Christ Our Life.

We individuals in mass human assemblies are touched at the root. It is a defining moment. The Spirit enters and implants a conviction that can never be reversed. With Peter, each of us asserts: “You are the Christ, you are the Son of the Living God you have the Words of Life.” And so, this has been our rich experience these past few days at Christ Our Life.

Amidst the enthusiasm and energy emerging from thousands, not only do we come to know and appreciate more clearly this Christ, but the experience becomes transformative. With Paul, we say: “It is no longer I who live but Jesus who lives in me.” Particularly instructive in this vein is the Gospel we have just heard of Lazarus and Dives, the rich man.

Today, the Church’s most recent saint, St. Teresa of Kolkata, stands as an icon for us as we ponder the relationship between rich and poor.

I vividly remember being a priest staff member at the Apostolic Delegation in Washington, D.C. a number of years ago. On one occasion, Mother Teresa was a house guest at the delegation.

One morning after having been engrossed in prayer as she sat on the floor of the Delegation's Chapel for three hours, she shared her experience of the night before.

She had participated in a grand "gala" at the Kennedy Center in the nation's Capital. She recounted the assembling of the very wealthy and elite. Lines of limousines, bright lights and hordes of media, glittering jewels and expensive dresses captured the eyes of bystanders.

As she witnessed this spectacle, it dawned on her how poor these rich people actually were, how their lives revolved around the superficial. Their investment and attention was on the material, on that which is doomed for extinction. Moreover, they almost exclusively depended on their own wits for guidance and life priorities. Worse yet, like Dives, the rich man in the Gospel, they were indifferent or perhaps oblivious to the poor, to those suffering, to those who were victims of injustice whom Pope Francis tells us live on the peripheries.

What a contrast, Mother Teresa stated, with the poor! The poor cannot help but be dependent on God – recognizing his providence as the source of their existence. They also typically share from their poverty with one another and even when the opportunity presents itself they share with the rich in an extraordinary way. Mother Teresa testified that those of us with means, can choose to illuminate their value, their goodness by uplifting the poor with our love. Of course, we need to see and be aware of their existence first. Considering the reflections of Mother Teresa, we might ask: But what did Mother Teresa see when she looked upon the poor? What she saw is what God sees, a sight developed ever more acutely over the years by her closeness to Jesus. Dives, the rich man, and so many of us remain blind to what is immediately in front of us because God is not enlightening our sight.

In desiccated lives we grow indifferent, perhaps even cold and insensitive to those around us who are poor. Habits become ingrained in us. We are warned, however, that separation from those who can benefit from our outreach, actually creates distance from the very God whom we profess to love. Jesus warns us that this has eternal consequences.

Pausing to consider the outcome of Dives, the rich man, and his eternal frustration, we realize it is wise for us to expand the questions that arise from this parable: "Is there anything in my life calling me into deeper awareness before it's too late? Is there a warning about my lifestyle that I need to hear? Is there someone I am not noticing who needs my assistance?" Like all scripture, the words of today speak to me in my situation. We need to be sensitive, so we can truly hear their summons.

We return now to Galilee. It is there that Jesus first captured the hearts of his Apostles. They were told to return there in order that they might put into perspective all that had happened to them. They were to ask, how were they now to incorporate what they had heard and seen in the intervening days namely the life and the dying and rising of Jesus. These memories burned deeply within them expanding the picture of their original encounter as they now experienced the Risen Jesus in Galilee. They were motivated to go and teach all nations fueled by the powerful mutuality of love each enjoyed with Jesus. Love now meant everything, no matter the cost.

Father Pedro Arrupe, the 28<sup>th</sup> Superior General of the Society of Jesus from 1965-1983 articulated beautifully what the first Galilean experience leads us to.

Nothing is more practical than  
finding God, than  
falling in Love  
in a quite absolute, final way.  
What you are in love with,  
what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.  
It will decide  
what will get you out of bed in the morning,  
what you do with your evenings,  
how you spend your weekends,  
what you read, whom you know,  
what breaks your heart,  
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.  
Fall in Love, stay in love,  
and it will decide everything.

As we return to Galilee, we find that original love for Christ and the triune God has been enriched and strengthened by Christ Our Life. This is our experience of these last few days. We are now better equipped to go out and proclaim the Joy of the Gospel.

As a measure of gratitude may we be motivated to share this love with all others, especially those cherished friends of Jesus – the poor.