

HOMILY
Christ Our Life Conference
October 16, 2010
Wells Fargo Arena, Des Moines

The basic question that stands starkly before each of us is that with which Jesus confronted his disciples:

“And you,” Jesus said to them,

“Who do you say that I am?”

“You are the Messiah,” Simon Peter answered

“The Son of the Living God.”

Matthew 16:15-16

In other testimony Peter stated: “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe, we are convinced you are God’s Holy One.” (John 6; 68-69)

Jesus is the one who has the Words of eternal life. What are these words? They are those which convey the mind and heart of the father – with whom Jesus shares the intimacy of life and love.

The message is captured in parables:

There is the story of the Father who receives; forgives and joyously welcomes his Prodigal Son who had burned through family inheritance on wonton pleasures of the flesh with dissolute women.

We are moved with empathy when we witness how the Samaritan, despised and rejected by contemporary Jews of Jesus’ time, reaches out with consummate compassion to the wounded victim fallen by the roadside. This example of care and recovery is translated into the openness to others which is expected of the disciples of Jesus.

Through the real-life encounters with the Christ we gain insight into the heart of the Father and his oneness with us in suffering moments.

Nothing compares in pain as to when a parent loses a child to death. The widow of Naim is distraught as her son is carried to his burial place. In the spirit of the Father, Jesus intervenes. The fallen son rises – his return to life bringing unspeakable consolation to his mother and stirring amazement among the crowd.

Attention to and intervention with the sick are also regularly exercised by Jesus. Through physical healings, Jesus points to the will of the Father that we be spiritually healed which healing leads to union with the Father.

- There is the story of the ten lepers. Separated and isolated from society, they are cleansed and integrated with their communities.
- The daughter of the centurion benefitted from her father's faith. This foreigner attributed divine power and responded to Jesus accordingly. Jesus was deeply impressed by this faith.
- Sentiments of sympathy well up in us when we observe the faith of the woman experiencing chronic bleeding. If only, she reasons, I touch the hem of the garment of the holy one, I will be rid of this curse. Jesus acknowledges her faith and responds with healing compassion.

God's ways are further communicated in the direct teaching of Jesus – particularly in the beatitudes and Mathew 25. They light for us the pathways of conversion and holiness.

“Blest are the poor in spirit.

Blest are those who show mercy.

Blest too are the peacemakers.”

(Matthew 5)

In the discourse on the Last Judgment, we hear

“For I was hungry and you gave me food

I was thirsty and you gave me drink

I was a stranger and you welcomed me

Naked and you clothed me.

I was ill and you comforted me

In prison and you came to visit me.”

(Matthew 25)

The Christ of the Gospels introduces us to his Father's ways. He provides insight to the character of the Father. This Christ reveals how the Father accompanies us in pain and suffering with compassion which is accessed through faith. The teaching of Christ

unleashes the process of conversion, which gradually aligns our thinking with that of the Father.

It is Thomas, however, who moves our recognition of Jesus as emissary of the Father, through miracles, through parables which teach, through instruction characterized by exceptional moral insights, to that of redeemer. Thomas needs to be sure and experience that before him is the actual Christ who underwent brutal and humiliating suffering and death and who has purportedly risen overcoming the power of death. He needs to know that Christ's rising is not merely imaginary.

Thomas is able to assure himself and those of the ages to come that the resurrection is fact, it is actuality. He does so by deliberately placing his hands in Jesus' wounds and inserting his hand in the side from which water and blood flowed from the cross. Thomas was able to determine for himself and all of us who come after him that this person Jesus is truly and fully human but also now risen from the dead. He is the Christ. He is the Son of God, and as such, the beloved of the Father. Thomas spontaneously exclaims: "My Lord and My God."

We who stand in similar faith, centuries later, are nourished through the death and resurrection of Jesus especially characterized by the blood and water that flowed from the side of Jesus as He hung upon the cross. We are fed by the sacraments which make present the saving action of Christ. In turn, because of who he is, the teaching of Jesus merits discipleship on our part. We, therefore, can strongly assent to the theme of this Conference, "Christ Our Life."

As we move from the inevitable shadows of doubt to the light of faith, we nourish our faith especially through our participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Jesus. Through the powerful Holy Spirit, the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, is made present. We are invited to join with Him in this sacrifice and return to the Father the gift of ourselves now one with Jesus. From this Eucharistic table we are nourished with the very body and blood of Jesus offered to the Father, immeasurably nourishing our faith and enabling the ways of God to become our own.

Fittingly, we begin the "Christ Our Life" convocation with this Eucharistic celebration. We bring a sense of faith and conversion to the present moment. It is our fervent hope that in the course of the next 36 hours, through the powerful witness of fellow believers, our esteemed speakers, through intense prayer and Eucharistic adoration, through lively conversation with one another and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can enter the concluding Eucharist with faith of greater depth and conviction.

We enter these hours together with hope. We recount the many believers of our time, whose transformation, whose life in Christ has produced remarkable fruit.

St. Theresa of Lisieux, the Little Flower, was so engulfed with belief in Christ that she was motivated to do something intensely significant for this Jesus, such as becoming a preacher, a teacher, or a missionary.

Limited by circumstances and health considerations, she ultimately found that what she could do was love. Love was at the core of the Gospel message. She would strive to be love in the center of her community. Such requires fullness of life in Christ.

St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish priest in the Nazi concentration camp, as a Christ figure, substituted his life for the father of a family. Having been sustained by Christ in his Life, Maximilian died that others might live.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta, being deeply steeped in the life of Christ, enabled her to minister to this Jesus among the poorest and dying –lovingly, one individual at a time.

Our hope and inspiration spring not only from individuals who have derived life from Christ. But we also grow by our relationship with the Church, the Body of Christ. It is through our coming together as fellow believers that we experience, “wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of the Father.”

As proclaimed today in the Letter to the Ephesians we pray that, “The eyes of our hearts be enlightened that we may know what is the hope that belongs to His call.”

The Church as the Body of Christ alive in the world today brings this hope not only among the circle of believers, but to the whole world. As was the case with the early Church may our faith grow so that observers will exclaim, “See how those Christians love one another.”

Christ Our Life leads and brings us together from doubt to ever stronger faith. And through our witness in faith we fulfill the vocation of making Jesus Christ known and loved in our times.