

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**TUESDAY OF THE 29<sup>TH</sup> WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**MEMORIAL OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II**  
**YOUTH APOSTLES CENTER, MCLEAN, VIRGINIA**  
**OCTOBER 22, 2019**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the personal representative of Pope Francis, I bring you greetings from the Holy Father, assuring you of his prayers and spiritual closeness. I thank Father John Peterson of the Youth Apostles for his kind invitation to be with all of you. Each of you has chosen to live in way that inspires your people to live their lives based on the Lord's sacrificial love through the discovery of the truth, by using your freedom responsibly, and by performing acts of charity. As we celebrate the memorial of Pope John Paul II, who was an ardent lover of young people and who started the World Youth Days, I feel confident that the saintly Pope is smiling favorably upon us and will assist you with his prayers.

Forty-one years ago, he was installed as Pope, and in his homily that day, he said:

“Do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the Pope and all those who wish to serve Christ and with Christ's power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ.” (Homily of Pope John Paul II, Inauguration of the Pontificate, 22 October 1978)

His whole pontificate, beginning with his encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis*, can be understood by giving priority to Christ, who is the abundance of God's love in the flesh. In our first reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, we hear: *If by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, **how much more** will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of justification come to reign through the one Jesus Christ.*

Sometimes we think of mercy and forgiveness as merely restoration of that which was lost or wounded by sin, but Paul reminds us that encounter God's mercy in Christ, we receive an abundance of grace. Elsewhere, Paul writes: *Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through justification for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

I want to emphasize this “how much more”. Think about the parable of the Prodigal Son, a parable which Pope Francis emphasizes, and which speaks to the depths of our hearts. There the younger son sins, repents, and desires to work as a servant in his father's house, but upon returning, his father treats him as a beloved son, vesting him in a robe, sandals, and ring, and throwing a feast for him. Here we can envision the super-abundance of God's grace.

Even the Church's liturgy reflects this in the Easter Vigil, when during the Exsultet, the deacon sings: *O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam, that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!* Later on, he sings: *“Our birth would have been no gain had we not been redeemed!”* Yes, the mercy that comes to us in Christ heals us and elevates us. Again, in the Ambrosian liturgy, celebrated in Milan, the priest sings: *“You bent down over our wounds and healed us, giving us a medicine stronger than our afflictions, a mercy*

*greater than our fault. In this way even by sin, by virtue of your invincible love, served to elevate us to the divine life.”* (Preface for the 16th Sunday)

This is precisely why Pope Francis speaks of mercy and why John Paul II began his pontificate speaking about Christ. If we have Him, we have everything we need. In his opening homily, he said:

“Do not be afraid. Christ knows ‘what is in man’. He alone knows it. So often today man does not know what is within him, in the depths of his mind and heart. So often, he is uncertain about the meaning of his life on this earth. He is assailed by doubt, a doubt which turns into despair. We ask you therefore, we beg you with humility and trust, let Christ speak to man. He alone has the words of life, yes, of eternal life.”

We have no need to be afraid of Christ. He comes to meet us – even in our weakness. He comes to heal us, redeem us, and raise us to live as his children and disciples. He gives us strength to tell others of his wonders. Today’s Gospel tells us not to be afraid of His grace but how instead to receive it. He asks that we have our lamps lit, watching vigilantly for his return; this demands prayer and perseverance in prayer. He also wants us to gird our loins and to tuck in our tunics – that is, he wants us to be at work and on mission, spreading the faith and helping others to learn how to wait for Him, meet Him, and collaborate with Him. This is what God demands of us. If we are vigilant in prayer and cooperate in His mission, then the Lord, the Master of the Household, will proceed to wait on us. He, the Master, will do this for us! Again, we see the generosity of God’s love. Why should we be afraid?

Reflecting on this Gospel, Pope Francis says:

“Nothing is more certain, in the faith of Christians, than this ‘appointment’, this appointment with the Lord, when He shall come. And when this day arrives, we Christians want to be like those servants who spent the night with their loins girded and their lamps burning – we must be ready for the salvation that comes; ready for the encounter. Have you thought about what that encounter with Jesus will be like, when He comes? It will be an embrace, an enormous joy, a great joy! We must live in anticipation of this encounter!”  
(Pope Francis, General Audience, 11 October 2017)

In Holy Communion, we will encounter the Lord once more. Do we live in anticipation of this encounter? Do we live joyfully in anticipation of encountering the Lord at the end of our days and at the end of time or do we live in fear? Elsewhere in scripture, it is written that *perfect love casts out all fear*. The Church is counting on the Youth Apostles – on all of you – to cast out fear by making known the love that comes to us in Christ Jesus.

I repeat once more the words of Saint John Paul II:

“Do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the Pope and all those who wish to serve Christ and with Christ’s power to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ.”