

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
31ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
FOUNDERS' FORUM OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis, and I express to you his spiritual closeness and paternal affection as we gather during this Founders' Forum of FOCUS for the celebration of Holy Mass. I also want to thank all of you for your generosity in the accompaniment and support of our young people on their journey.

Your support helps them develop a vision for their future and for their future with God in Christ. Here, perched on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, we contemplate the vision for FOCUS but even more importantly our vision for the Church and the world, which ultimately is directed toward the vision of God.

At the beginning of my mission in the United States, I gave a lecture entitled, the "Vision of Pope Francis for the Twenty-First Century: An Open World." What is the vision of Pope Francis? In short, his is one of openness. He has a vision of an open world in which people can encounter God and others, even strangers. His is a vision of a world and Church, without sacrificing essentials or identity, open to new ideas. His vision includes rather than excludes and involves dialogue and missionary discipleship so that those at the peripheries may experience mercy and peace.

Without vision the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18) To have vision is to be attentive to the "signs of the times" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4); to see what truly is, engaging reality; and, to look forward in hope to an encounter with the Lord of History. The vision of Pope Francis goes beyond abstract ideas to see the concrete reality of life – of persons, cultures and the conditions of our world. In his exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes:

There also exists a constant tension between ideas and realities. Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. There has to be continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities. It is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric ...Realities are greater than ideas. (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 231)

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus offers us a teaching on the greatest commandment, which cannot remain at the level of ideas alone but which must be made a concrete reality. He reminds us of the commandment to love, which is two-fold: to love God and neighbor. Tomorrow is the Solemnity of All Saints, and the saints are those, who trusting in God's grace, tried to live according to the law of love. Those who live in a profound relationship with God, the way a child begins to learn to love from his mother or father, become more and more able to put the commandment to love in practice.

St. John of Avila, in his *Treatise on the Love of God*, wrote that "the cause that mostly pushes our hearts to love of God is considering deeply the love that He had for us.... This, beyond any benefit, pushes

the heart to love; because he who gives something of benefit to another, gives him something he possesses; but he who loves, gives himself with everything he has, until he has nothing left to give.”

Although we speak of the “commandment to love”, we must acknowledge that more than a commandment imposed upon us, love is a gift, a reality that God allows us to know and experience. Love begins with God’s initiative toward us, and we manifest our love for God in our response to Him, including loving our neighbor. The novelty of the New testament is the figure of Jesus Christ. In His Beloved Son, God seeks out lost humanity, and this seeking out the lost culminates in the Cross, which is the pinnacle of God’s love toward us.

In contemplating the immense love that God has for each of us and all humanity, we discover the path for our own lives. What we celebrate and experience at Mass is Jesus’ oblation love for us. We do not receive a mere “thing” in the Eucharist but the Person of Jesus Christ who opens up new horizons for us and gives our life a decisive direction, to paraphrase Benedict XVI (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 1). Jesus’ love gives us new vision; it draws us out of ourselves to love our neighbor.

Love is more than a requirement; love is a gift. It is a response to God’s love. While at times we speak of love as being commanded, it can only be commanded, because it has first been given by Him who loved us, even when we did not deserve it. Fathers and mothers do not love their children only when they deserve love; they always love them, even when they do something wrong or are forced to correct them.

We learn from God to look at each other not only with our eyes, but with the eyes of God, which is the gaze of Jesus Christ. A gaze that begins in the heart and penetrates to the heart and desires of the other who is waiting to be heard, longing for caring attention, and who has a deep desire to be loved.

If we think about the scriptures, they are filled with stories about the need not only to love God but also our neighbor; that is, God’s love is to be extended to others, to those made in His image and likeness. Consider the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man failed to help the poor man and pretended like he didn’t exist, except when he needed him to do something. He disregarded him and was indifferent to his plight. That story warns us of the need to be attentive to our neighbor, especially to the poor.

Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Our neighbor is no longer someone who belongs to our country or tribe. Here Jesus universalizes the concept of neighbor. The present migration crisis makes us re-examine the question: who is my neighbor? Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti*, calls us not only to be neighbors but brothers. In this parable, the Lord abolishes the limits to love: we are called to love every person.

The Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) scene, marvelously depicted in the Sistine Chapel, makes clear that love is the ultimate or definitive criterion for judgment: *Whatever you did for the last of my brothers, you did for me*. We demonstrate our love for God and the person of Jesus, in particular, by loving our neighbor. But the reverse is also true: by opening myself to another and by generously making myself available to another, I am also opening myself to know God.

Love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable. Jesus did not invent one or the other but revealed that they are essentially a single commandment. The person of Jesus embodies the unity of love of God and neighbor. In the Eucharist, He gives us this two-fold love. By giving Himself to us, we learn to

love one another as He has loved us; thus, there is formed a Eucharistic coherency to our whole way of life.

Our sharing in the Eucharistic Mystery goes beyond mere feelings to true love, and the more we deepen this love, the more we begin to love what God loves - and God loves everyone. Mother Teresa used to say that her love of Christ in the poorest of the poor flowed from encountering Christ in the Eucharist. God's friends become our friends, and in union with God, we begin to develop hearts that see where love is needed and begin to meet the need for love. This is the true vision our world needs!