

**ADDRESS BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
FRATERNAL GATHERING WITH ARCHBISHOP ALEXANDER SAMPLE  
AND THE PRIESTS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PORTLAND IN OREGON  
MOUNT ANGEL SEMINARY – SAINT BENEDICT, OREGON  
MAY 10, 2024**

Dear Brothers,

It is good to be with you. Archbishop Sample, thank you for your kind invitation to spend this time with you and your priests. As the Pope’s representative to the U.S., I want you all to know of the Holy Father’s fraternal closeness to you as a brother priest.

As a way of orienting us to the reflection I would like to share with you, let me take you back to November of 2013, when Pope Francis gave us his pastoral vision in *Evangelii Gaudium*. He said:

“It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to.”<sup>1</sup>

This personal *knowing* of Jesus is necessary for our evangelization of others because, first of all, it is necessary for *our own spiritual life*. As the Pope went on to say: “A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him.”<sup>2</sup>

Brothers, this is the *living encounter* that I would like to encourage you to remember. We know how important it is, not only to have been encountered by Christ in a very personal way, but to keep alive the sustaining grace of that encounter. One way of doing that, as the Pope likes to remind us, is to go back to what he calls

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2103, 266.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*.

“our own Galilee”<sup>3</sup>: that moment in our lives when the Lord entered our life, looked on us with love, and called us to follow him. It was because of the personal warmth and attraction of Jesus’ gaze upon us that we were inspired to set out after him. And when we continue to be filled with the joy of the Lord’s friendship with us, our invitation to others to become his disciples has the power of personal witness.

Another reason that our priestly ministry should always be a testimony to our personal and ongoing encounter with Christ is that, when we proclaim Christ – his person, his real action in our lives – we avoid being advocates merely of an *idea*, which can then become an ideology. We get locked into ideology whenever we begin with a particular idea – a certain part of the truth regarding Christ and his Church – and judge everything else through the lens of that idea. But when our proclamation of the Gospel begins anew each day from the way in which Christ is actually meeting us that day – *and sometimes he meets us in ways that surprise us!* – then our preaching, teaching, and witness will give life and hope to the hearer. “We are liberated,” the Pope says, “from our narrowness and self-absorption,” and “we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being.”<sup>4</sup>

So, there is certainly a lot of good that happens in our mission of evangelization when we begin from our encounter with Christ. But in the context of this fraternal gathering, I would also like to address the importance of that personal encounter for our communion as brother priests. Too often, the last thing that we talk about with each other as priests is what it means to have Christ in our lives. This is unfortunate! When we come together, we “share notes”, we “talk shop”, and let’s face it: we compare our ministry to each other to see if we’re “measuring up”. Certainly, talking with each other about our work in the apostolate, especially to learn from each other and to collaborate, is important and helpful. But it is even more important that we go a step deeper: that we relate to one another on the basis of our individual and shared encounter with Christ. In essence, that we communicate with each other about our friendship with the Lord. Being thankful together for that

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Homily at Mass for Monday of the Third Week of Easter, 27 April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium*, 8.

friendship, supporting one another in its trials, and encouraging one another with the hope that this friendship brings.

This can be hard for us to do – as men, as brother priests. Perhaps we are afraid of the “vulnerability” that occurs when we relate in this way. And yet, if we are looking to strengthen our communion and fraternity as priests of Jesus, is it not necessary for us to know each other on the level of that relationship with the Lord that unites us all?

I am given the sense that, with the help of your Archbishop’s leadership and example, your presbyterate has experienced a greater opening for this level of fraternal sharing. I encourage you to continue this. We priests experience friendship with Christ in a unique way – a way that only fellow priests can fully understand. And so, it is important that we be able to have a certain openness with our brother priests about the reality of our ongoing encounter with the Lord.

After the Resurrection, Jesus himself modeled for the Apostles the kind of openness that he wanted to have with them, and ultimately with each other. He did this by showing them his wounds. These were the wounds that he suffered on his way to manifesting the full meaning of his identity as God’s beloved Son. By insisting that his closest collaborators, his first priests, see and touch his wounds, Jesus offered the Apostles two gifts. First, the gift of knowing that he is like them: a man of flesh and blood, who has been hurt deeply by people and events in this fallen world. Second, he gives them the gift of hope: the proclamation that those very wounds have given birth to a new and glorious life, not only for himself, but for *them*, his friends and followers who will also be wounded.

Dear Brothers: as priests of Jesus, not only do we carry our own wounds, but we also carry the wounds of the Body of Christ, the Church. That will always be a central part of the vocation of a priest: to carry with Christ the wounds of his Church. In order that these wounds be the birthplace of hope and joy, instead of isolation and despair, it will do us good to learn how to bear them together as priests of Jesus Christ.

If our communion as priests is to be strong, it is important that we not allow polarization to become division, as we see happening in the wider society, and even at times in the Church. The same political and ecclesiological differences that exist around us will inevitably be present in our presbyterate. How, then, do we accept this reality without it becoming the cause of division? If we approach our relationships with our brother priests on the basis of each one's encounter with Christ, and the encounter with Christ that we share as his priests, then we already have a foundation for communion that can withstand all kinds of diversity. And not only *withstand*, but actually be *enriched* by, that diversity. What happens, for instance, when we encounter a brother priest whose mode of expression, or whose opinion or idea, conflicts with our own? Do we approach him as if we are in competition, and either he or I must prevail? What if, instead, we approach a brother, fundamentally, as one who has met Christ and is in relationship with Christ. A *particular* relationship, perhaps somewhat different from ours, but a relationship with the same Christ who is also our friend and Lord. Approaching one another in this way – on the basis that we both have a relationship with the Lord, and that he chooses each of us – can provide for us an enduring ground of unity, as well as expand our own horizons and contribute to our ongoing conversion.

One last encouragement I would like to offer concerns our communion of mind and heart with the Holy Father. Francis is the Pope for today. As our faith teaches us, he “is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful”<sup>5</sup>. If we choose to, we can allow this truth of our faith to give us confidence in deciding to remain united with the Holy Father in mind and heart. There are different opinions and ideas about how to do things, and these differences aren't bad – they're good! This is something that Pope Francis has said a lot: our differences are actually important and good for the sake of a true synodal Church. We need to trust a process that allows different ideas to be held in tension, for real discernment to take place, and for a path forward to open up under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>5</sup> Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November 1964, 23; cited by *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 882.

These are just a few simple thoughts, which I hope have some resonance with you. But I am also happy to welcome any questions or topics of discussion you may have.