

REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
ON THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *CHRISTUS VIVIT*
WITH THE STUDENTS OF SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis. I am happy to be back at Sacred Heart University and to participate in this “Catholic Intellectual Tradition” seminar. I have been asked to give some brief remarks on the Holy Father’s recent exhortation *Christus Vivit*, which was promulgated following the recent Synod on Youth.

It has been nearly three and a half years since I was appointed as nuncio to the United States. One of my first engagements was in Rockville Centre, where I delivered an address entitled, “Evangelization in a Time of Change.” Pope Francis says that we are not so much living in an epoch of change as in a change of epoch. Society is changing rapidly through advancements in science and technology and through migration.

The culture is becoming rapidly secularized, and families and parishes are struggling to hand on the faith to young people. Young people have hopes and dreams for their future, and yet, many do not have a sense of belonging to the Church. The practice of the faith seems to be waning and even when it is practiced, it is often practiced in a purely formal way. The increasing presence of the “nones”, those who practice no religion whatsoever, adds to the worrying situation.

Even before he became Pope, then-Cardinal Bergoglio noted:

“I would say that the gravely serious thing that all this is expressing is a lack of a personal encounter with God, of an authentic religious experience. This is what I believe creates in the end the “religion a la carte” I believe that one has to recover the religious act as a movement towards an encounter with Jesus Christ.” (S. RUBIN-F. AMBROGETTI, *EL JESUITA*, Bs. As., 2010, 80-81)

For this reason (and many others), the Holy Father called bishops, priests, religious, and lay men and women, including young people, together last October for a Synod on Youth, Vocations, and Discernment. He wanted to offer pastoral suggestions as young people from around the world and to accompany them on their spiritual journey. Additionally, he was aware that many of the spiritual needs of young people were not being met.

Following the synod, after a period of reflection and discernment, he wrote his exhortation *Christus vivit* - Christ is alive. It would be impossible for me to summarize the whole document, but I would like to share with you what I believe are the most important parts of the document.

The first thing I would highlight is that young people are the “now of God.” Many people will say that young people are the future of the Church. I think the Holy Father would disagree; he writes that “They are its present; even now, they are helping to enrich it.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *CHRISTUS VIVIT*, 25 MARCH 2019, 64). Young people are part of the Church now and “can offer the Church

the beauty of youth by renewing her ability to ‘rejoice with new beginnings, to give unreservedly of herself, to be renewed and to set out for ever greater accomplishments.’” (cf. CV, 37)

Secondly, as members of the Church, young people are called to give witness to Christ and are certainly capable of giving effective witness. In the first two chapters of the document, the Holy Father places before us not only the figures of the young Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, but also the host of Old and New Testament figures who prophesied on the Lord’s behalf or who carried out important missions in the early Church. He provides a list of young saints, who can serve as models for us, including St. Francis, St. Joan of Arc, St. Kateri, St. Therese. He even mentions a young French man, Blessed Marcel Callo, who strengthened fellow prisoners in a concentration camp in Austria (CV, 61). We cannot be those saints. We can imitate them and their virtues, but God calls each of us by name to serve him a unique way. God is calling you to witness to holiness by being yourself. St. Francis de Sales says, “be who you are and be that well in honor of the Craftsman whose handiwork you are.”

By using examples from the Bible, from salvation history, and from the lives of the saints, Pope Francis is encouraging young people to proclaim the faith by their very lives.

Thirdly, I think that essentially what the Pope wants to say in *Christus vivit* is that **Christianity is not simply teachings and rules but a proclamation.** There must be a kerygmatic approach to faith that attracts followers and new believers. In my talk in Rockville Centre in 2016, I mentioned that Pope Francis described the essence of Christianity in this way:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ bursts forth into our history, marked by its vulnerability, with an incomparable dynamism, full of strength and courage. That is the kerygma, the nucleus of our preaching: the proclamation about the bursting forth into our history of Jesus Christ, in His Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection.” (JORGE BERGOGLIO, *EL VERDADERO PODER ES EL SERVICIO*, EDITORIAL CLARETIANA, BS. AS. 2007, 197.)

If we are to make new disciples, it must be by proclaiming the essential truths - the God became man; that He suffered in the flesh to redeem us; and that He rose from the dead. That is, He is truly alive! In Chapter 4 of *Christus vivit*, Pope Francis speaks of three great truths: **God loves you; Christ is your Savior; and He is alive!**

God loves you. He loves you, even if at times you sin or disappoint Him or others. Pope Francis encourages young people to “Trust the memory of God. His memory is not a ‘hard disk’ that ‘saves’ and ‘archives’ all our data. His memory is a heart filled with tender compassion, one that finds joy in deleting every trace of evil.” (cf. CV, 115) From the beginning of his Pontificate, Francis has emphasized God’s mercy and love. If we read the Scriptures, the image that emerges is not that of the God of Wrath, but that of the Merciful Father and the Good Shepherd. God loves you.

Christ is your Savior. The New Testament is clear that Christ is the Mediator of Salvation. He comes to save you and all of humanity. The Holy Father laments the fact that we live in a throwaway culture in which even people are discarded and excluded. In *Christus vivit*, he reminds young people of the great value of human life, inviting them to reflect on, “How valuable you must be, if you were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ! Dear young people, you are priceless! You are not up for sale.” (CV, 122) Of course, he immediately turns our eyes back to Christ exhorting us to keep our eyes fixed on the outstretched arms of the Crucified One. He reconciles and saves.

Christ is alive! This is the essence of the Christian faith. Death does not have the last word. Jesus is Risen. He is alive! But is He alive in your life? In your parish? The Holy Father wants us to examine whether faith has become a series of teachings or something purely formal or whether the newness of the Risen Lord impacts our humanity, changes us, and helps us live in a different way.

The Holy Father writes:

“Christ is alive! We need to keep reminding ourselves of this, because we can risk seeing Jesus simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged, it would not set us free. The one who fills us with his grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive.” (CV, 124)

But do we encounter the Risen Lord? This is what is often missing from the way Christianity and Catholicism are presented. There is a genuine desire of people for an encounter with the Divine. This is what the Pope wants to build: a culture of encounter:

“...if you are willing to encounter the Lord, if you are willing to let him love you and save you, if you can make friends with him and start to talk to him, the living Christ, about the realities of your life, then you will have profound experience capable of sustaining your entire Christian life. You will also be able to share the experience with other young people. For “being a Christian is not a result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” (CV, 129)

Pope Francis continues that, “The Holy Spirit fills the heart of the risen Christ and then flows over into your lives. When you receive the Spirit, he draws you ever more deeply into the heart of Christ, so that you can grow in his life, his life and his power.” (CV, 130) The Holy Spirit helps us experience the message of the kerygma, to live it more fully, and to respond with passion to the Lord’s invitation to witness to him. (CV, 132)

Fourthly, in sharing our faith, the kerygma must be the guiding principle. Having been loved by the Lord and changed by Christ, we are sent forth in the power of the Spirit to proclaim the Good News. Early in the exhortation, the Pope writes about how young people can guide other young people:

“The Lord is calling us to enkindle stars in the night of other young people. He asks you to look to the true stars, all those varied signs he gives us to guide our way, and to imitate the farmer who watches the stars before going out to plough his field. God lights up stars to help us keeping walking: “The stars shine in their watches, and are glad: he calls them, and they say, ‘Here we are!’ (Bar 3:34-35). Christ Himself is our great light of hope and our guide in the night for he is the ‘bright morning star.’” (CV, 33)

In Chapter 7 of *Christus vivit*, Pope Francis he reminds us how we are to enkindle stars in the night of other young people:

“We need to use above all the language of closeness, the language of generous relational and existential love that touches the heart, impacts life, and awakens hope and desires. Young people need to be approached with the grammar of love, not by being preached

at.” (CV, 211)

In sum, I would say four things: You are the now of God. You are not only called to give witness but are capable of giving witness. Your witness can take the form of an essential proclamation: God loves you. Christ saves you. Christ is alive. Finally, your outreach to others will embody this kerygma, showing forth the attractiveness of Christianity, conveying the closeness and love of God. We need a “fresh experience of the kerygma” with the ability to “integrate the knowledge of head, heart, and hands.” (CV, 222) In conclusion, let me just say that the Pope believes in you. He is counting on you to be the ones to witness to the beauty of faith, with lives changed by the encounter with Christ.