

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
“IF YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF GOD”: SUPPORTING CHRIST’S ENCOUNTER WITH HIS BELOVED
FIAT MINISTRIES “FEAST FOR FIAT” BENEFIT DINNER
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI CATHOLIC SCHOOL – WICHITA, KANSAS
NOVEMBER 15, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the Pope’s representative to the United States, I am happy to be here in Wichita, and to convey to all of you the spiritual presence and loving communion of the Holy Father Pope Leo. I am grateful to Bishop Kemme for welcoming me to this Diocese, and to Emily Savage and “Team Fiat” for introducing me to the work of *Fiat Ministries*.

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When I was about to be ordained a bishop, a little more than 30 years ago, I chose for my motto the words of Jesus to the woman at the well: “*Si scires donum Dei*”—“If you knew the gift of God...” (*Jn 4:10*).

The gift, which that woman was about to receive from our Lord, was of course the gift of the divine Spirit. But what did that mean for the woman’s life? It meant that, from that moment on, the wellspring of the happiness and meaning she had long sought was now flowing within her. So much so, that she forgot the thirst for which she had come to that well, and she wanted nothing more than to proclaim Jesus to others.

What we want for our daughters and our sisters—what we want for ourselves and for everyone—is what the Samaritan woman received at the well:

An encounter with Jesus that reveals to her who she is—that she is seen, known, and loved by the One who wants to make her happy.

Put another way: what happened for that woman, and what we want to happen for the girls and the women whom we love, is what Pope Benedict XVI described when he said, “Being Christian is not the 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.”¹

This is what we want for those we love, no matter what *particular* vocation the Lord calls them to—whether to a form of consecrated or religious life, or to marriage, or to a unique way of loving as a single person in the world.

Love for God in Marriage

Even for someone who is married, it is still only Jesus who can see the person with perfect clarity, love them in a saving way, and make them completely happy.

In fact, it is only when spouses depend on God for their total fulfillment that they give each other the freedom to love each another in a human way. To depend on your spouse for your total happiness is to place on someone a burden that even the best of people cannot bear.

But on the other hand, if both spouses in a marriage can look to God to satisfy the deepest longings of their hearts, then it becomes easier for them to turn to each other for a love that is both realistic and genuinely fulfilling. Because they are freed from the burden of “saving” the other, they can enjoy the fullness and the richness—and even the “imperfection”—of each other’s love. Their imperfections, together with their virtues, are encompassed in the love of God.

This is the power that enables spouses to embody for each other the great Pauline hymn of love we hear so often at weddings: Love is patient... kind... forgiving... forbearing (*cf. 1 Cor 13:4-7*). You can forgive your spouse, and “put up with” their flaws—even joyfully!—when you are not depending on your spouse to equal the perfection of God’s love, but only to participate in that divine love in their own human way.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* on Christian Love, 25 December 2005, §1.

Love for God in Religious Life

It is essentially the same for a person who enters a religious community—or *any* community, for that matter. When we ask a religious sister, “How did you know that this was the community where you belonged?” oftentimes she will say, “I felt, when I was with them, that I was ‘at home’.”

This is beautiful. And very often this experience is a true grace: this sense of “home” gives the postulant, or the novice, the security she needs to pursue her calling more deeply within that community.

But inevitably, this initial grace will be tested. There must come that season of “disillusionment”—just like it comes to the married person—during which the early warmth and ease of the relationship is confronted by the coolness of conflict and difficulty.

For the woman religious, it turns out that her “home” is not perfect, and the other people who live there are not angels! (Perhaps she herself is not an angel either!)

What will sustain the woman religious during this time of testing?

Of course, the answer is not a “what” but a *Who*. Jesus is the One who encountered her in the beginning. He is the One who saw her, and knew her, and loved her completely. She felt “at home” in the community because that is the place where Jesus had led her.

Just as the married woman will only grow in her marriage if she continues to turn to God as her one perfect lover—thus enabling her to receive her husband’s love with gratitude—so too the religious sister will only grow in her vocation if she keeps Christ as her spouse, which then allows her to love and be loved by her fellow sisters, in all their shared weakness and good will.

This is how it was for the woman at the well. Having met the One who loved her perfectly, she became a free and life-giving presence within her community.

Encounter with Christ as Source of Joy and Fidelity

In both vocations—marriage and the religious life—the human love involved is not something we “settle for”; but rather, it is something both beautiful and enriching. But it all depends on that *encounter* with the Lord, which was—and must remain—the *source* of a person’s vocation.

That is why Pope Francis often encouraged us to “go back to our own personal Galilee.” In other words, we should ask: *Where was it that Jesus encountered me and told me the story of my dignity?* That encounter, like the encounter we have with Christ in the Eucharist, is not a static event in history. It is, rather, a living event that continues to nourish us on our journey, so long as we remain open to the One who met us, and to the grace that he gave us.

So, the encounter with Christ is the source of all our joy. But it is also the source of our *fidelity*.

Last week, Pope Leo spoke to some religious sisters about fidelity. He said that the secret of their fidelity “is found precisely in their encounter with the Risen Jesus.... That is where we begin and from where we start again.”²

You are all “good Catholics” here, right? (And even if some here are not Catholic, I am sure you are “good Christians”!) And so, because you are good Catholics, you teach your children the commandments, you train them to observe the precepts of the Church, you talk about the virtues—am I right?

But is fidelity defined by merely keeping a precept—following a rule?

We “good Catholics” can sometimes get stuck at the stage of “doing the right things”, of “checking a list”, and of bringing our list of transgressions to confession like a report card in school.

Of course: confession is good, observing the precepts is good. But Christian fidelity is not like passing a course.

² Pope Leo XIV, Address to Participants in the General Chapters of the Religious of Jesus and Mary and of the Scalabrinian Sisters, 6 November 2025.

Fidelity is about a *personal relationship* with the One who created and redeemed us. It means *walking with God*, responding to his initiative of love. The personal encounter—when Christ revealed himself to you and showed you who you are in his eyes—is the source and measure of your fidelity. To be faithful, then, is to live each day in the truth of that encounter, true to the person you became when you discovered that you are loved by God.

We follow the precepts, not as if they are arbitrary rules, but because they keep us close to *him*. And that is the point of our lives: that we are loved by him, and his love is the reason for everything we do.

Conclusion and Thanksgiving

Dear friends, I am happy that you are here. By being involved with *Fiat Ministries*, you are supporting an *encounter* that Jesus wants to have—personally—with each girl, each young woman, each person whose happiness you desire, and whose fidelity will become a witness to others. By your involvement in this ministry, you are serving the desire of Christ, who wants to make these young women's lives completely part of his own.

Thank you, Emily and Team Fiat, for your fidelity to Christ's encounter with you in your own lives. Thank you, Bishop Kemme, for lending the support of your episcopal vocation to the work of this ministry.

And thank you to everyone, for your participation in this work of the risen Christ.

If we know the gift of God in our own lives, then we will want nothing more than to share that gift with others.