

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
TUESDAY OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM “DISCOVERING POPE FRANCIS”
SACRED HEART SEMINARY AND SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, FRANKLIN, WISCONSIN

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father’s representative to the United States, I greet you once more and express His Holiness’ spiritual closeness as we gather at this liturgy. There is a temptation today, amid numerous crises, to act immediately to bring about a much-desired and perhaps much-needed reform in the Church. Today’s scriptures provide a remedy for that temptation, because they invite us to contemplation and receptivity prior to action.

In the Lukan account of Jesus’ encounter with Martha and Mary, Martha busies herself with hospitality and household service to Jesus. She is a bit perturbed that her sister is just sitting there, not helping. We too busy ourselves with activity in the ministry or in family life, with a seemingly endless list of tasks. Jesus does not deny the goodness of Martha’s works, but when she complains, He cuts to the heart of the matter – Martha is *anxious and worried about many things*. He wants her to heed the words of the Psalmist: *Be still and know that I am God*. (Ps 46:10). There is need of only one thing – Jesus Himself. It is this that Mary has chosen. Mary sits at the feet of Jesus and listens to His life-giving Word. This is what directs her life. Without this Word, our actions could be misdirected or meaningless or even be driven by ideology rather than Faith. From contemplation of the Word, right action will flow.

In his encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote:

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. (BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *DEUS CARITAS EST*, 25 DECEMBER 2005, 1)

Mary stopped and sat at the feet of Jesus. She encountered Him and truly welcomed Him into her heart; this gave her life meaning and direction – something that could never be taken from her. Similarly, Paul had a life-changing encounter with Jesus along the road to Damascus; he, who had *progressed in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries* and who *was a zealot for his ancestral traditions*, was transformed by grace to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul did not immediately go to Jerusalem or begin consulting flesh and blood, as if his apostolic commission was from earthly powers; rather, following in the footsteps of Elijah, who was also zealous for the Lord, he went off to Arabia – to contemplate the Crucified Lord and to prepare himself to be a “light to the nations.”

After three years, he finally went to Jerusalem to meet Cephas and to confer with him, remaining with him for fifteen days. What did they confer about? During the Year of Saint Paul, Pope Benedict XVI suggested that the First Letter to the Corinthians provides two insights, when Paul writes, “I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received”: namely the central elements of the celebration of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23-25) and Jesus’ death and resurrection – *that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried and that he*

was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5).

Here I want to emphasize the importance of Paul sharing communion with Peter. He learned from him, deepening his knowledge of the kerygma, and remained with him. This is an important aspect of what we are doing here— trying to learn from the Successor Saint Peter and to strengthen bonds of communion. We attempt to learn, to process, to bring our studies to prayer so that we, like Saint Paul, might be more fit for the mission of evangelization. In the Church, there are a diversity of charisms – active life and contemplative life, but we need above all, not only an integrated life, but also Christ Himself at the center of our lives.

In Martha and Mary, we see members of a family trying, even with some difficulty, to live in harmony with each other. In Paul, we see that though he was of Jewish origin, he was transformed by God’s grace, to bring salvation to the Gentiles, serving as an instrument of unity in the Church and sharing communion with Peter and the other Apostles. Harmony. Unity. Peace. In the cases of Martha, Mary, and Paul each was living in union with Christ, according to his or her vocation. In them, we see that close unity between contemplation and action can be achieved when open to God’s grace.

In these days, as we contemplate the thought of Pope Francis and the evangelizing mission of the Church, we undoubtedly will hear the term “missionary disciples”. We are first disciples, who like Mary need to listen to God’s Word, before we can be missionaries, like Paul, and share it with others. Still, the first and model disciple for us is the Blessed Virgin.

The Holy Father notes a “Marian style” to the work of evangelization:

“She is a woman of prayer and work in Nazareth, and she is also Our Lady of Help, who sets out from her town “with haste” (Luke 1:39) to be of service to others. The interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others, is what makes the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization.”
(cf. POPE FRANCIS, *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 288)

The Virgin teaches us the importance of attentive listening, unceasing prayer, and sacrificial offering in the service of evangelization. May she intercede for us during these days, so that we may discover the one thing that we truly need – her Son Jesus the Lord.