

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



“Christ is Alive!”

“Christ is Alive!” In these days, together as members of the Church, we celebrate the Paschal Mystery, when we once again enter more deeply into the Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Lord! The central message of these days, indeed of our faith, is captured in the phrase: “Christ is Alive!” These words, the title of the Holy Father’s most recent Apostolic Exhortation following upon the 2018 Synod on youth, addressed to young people and to the entire people of God, are perfect words for us to reflect upon in this Easter time.

As is the longstanding custom for papal documents, Pope Francis’ work takes its title from the very first words of the text, “Christ is alive!” He writes: “Christ is alive! He is our hope...the very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian are these: Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive.” Indeed, the Lord who is alive desires us to be alive in Him!

Now, some reading this may say, but I haven’t been a “young Christian” for years! But whether we are young or young at heart, these three words are meant for all of us. “Christ is alive!” We join in a prayer of thanksgiving for so many this year who, like a good friend of mine a few years ago, completed their formation after having been baptized Catholic but never catechized, and were received into the fullness of the Catholic faith at Easter. Though in her sixties, she joked she was a baby Catholic! We offer thanks for the numerous men, women and children who were baptized into Christ and His Church at the Easter Vigil. We rejoice in the countless folks who, accepting the mercy of the Lord after years away from the Sacrament of Confession, returned to the Lord this Lent, to the practice of the faith and to Sunday Mass. For all of these, Christ is alive in a new way.

To be sure, the Pope’s Apostolic Exhortation is directed principally to youth, and to those directly engaged in their pastoral care.

Throughout the document, the importance of a personal encounter with Christ is evident. Youth are encouraged to remember and honor their roots, to embrace the living Word of God, to engage in discernment to discover their true vocation, to bring their enthusiasm, energy and vision to bear for the Church, to utilize the digital world for the good, to dare to be different and to be missionaries of the Gospel.

In his message to youth, Pope Francis highlights three great truths: that “God loves you,” that “Christ saves you,” and that “He is alive.” The Holy Father writes: “We need to keep reminding ourselves of this...because we can risk seeing Jesus Christ 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” (124). If He is alive, “there can be no doubt that goodness will have the upper hand in your life...then we can stop complaining and look to the future,

for with him this is always possible. That is the certainty we have" (127).

It is with just this certainty that I ask all of our lay faithful, consecrated religious, deacons and priests to make every effort to accompany our young people on their path toward maturity in Christ and to be for them models whose very lives announce that Christ is alive. At the same time, I also invite everyone to live themselves in the certainty that He is alive!

"Christ is Alive!" The title of the most recent papal document does indeed sum up the very essence of our faith. Saint Paul writes, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ" (1Cor15:14-15). Pope Emeritus Benedict wrote: "With these words Saint Paul explains quite drastically what faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ means for the Christian message overall: it is its very foundation. The Christian faith stands or falls with the truth of

the testimony that Christ is risen from the dead" (*Jesus of Nazareth* II, 241).

It is for each of us then, whether young or young at heart, to accept, to embrace and to offer testimony in our daily lives of that fundamental truth: Christ is risen from the dead. But how does that translate into our daily lives? Christ is alive when we choose the good over the evil we are tempted to do. Christ is alive when we recognize Jesus Christ in the poor as we care for them as Christ himself. Christ is alive when, even in the face of the wounds inflicted upon members of the Church and the Church herself by our own, we remain faithful and steadfast, looking to the future with renewed hope. Christ is alive when we are humble enough to forgive and to ask forgiveness. Christ is alive when, despite what the world says, we proclaim the truth in charity in living and sharing the Gospel and the authentic teaching of the Church. Christ is alive when we choose to live in the joy of the resurrection, despite any suffering we have to endure.

In "Christ is Alive," Pope Francis offers this positive and encouraging word: "See Jesus as happy,

overflowing with joy. Rejoice with him as with a friend who has triumphed. They killed him, the holy one, the just one, the innocent one, but he triumphed in the end. Evil does not have the last word. Nor will it have the last word in your life, for you have a friend who loves you and wants to triumph in you. Your Savior lives" (126).

Dear friends, announce with every fiber of your being: "Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!" The Lord who is alive desires us to be alive in Him!

The Apostolic Exhortation [Christus Vivit](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html) (Christ is Alive) may be found at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html.



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