

## LIVING AS DISCIPLES OF THE LORD

- Introduction
  - Great to be here. Honored to be invited. You have one of the finest and most influential priests in the country as your pastor, who nourishes the faith of thousands through his books, writings, videos and more.
  - Very happy to have been asked by him to speak on Living Today as Disciples of the Lord, a theme we should regularly ponder who love the Lord Jesus.
  - We're now at a time of year during which the Church asks us to think about this. The beginning of Ordinary Time focuses on Jesus' public ministry, which was really a time of calling and forming disciples.
  - A band formed around him: not just the Twelve whom he would appoint as apostles, but also his mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, so many of those he healed, those who would hear him preach the Sermon on the Mount and the Bread of Life Discourse, who would follow him along the road as he preached the Parables of the Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, who would eat the multiplication of the loaves and fish, who would be with him in the Temple precincts, who would be with him on Calvary or flee from him after his arrest.
  - Great scene in the movie A Hidden Life, about Blessed Franz Jagerstatter, an Austrian Catholic who was killed by the Nazis for his opposition to the Nazis and their ideology. He served as a volunteer sacristan in his village of Radegund. One day in the movie, he's in the Church helping a painter named Ohlendorf, who was painting beautiful scenes of angels and glory. But it wasn't really what the painter wanted to paint. Trusting in Franz, he spoke of artists like him and said:
    - What we do, is just create - sympathy. We create -- we create admirers. We don't create followers. Christ's life is a demand. You don't want to be reminded of it. So we don't have to see what happens to the truth. A darker time is coming, when men will be more clever. They won't fight the truth, they'll just ignore it. I paint their comfortable Christ, with a halo over his head. How can I show what I haven't lived? Someday I might have the courage to venture, not yet. Someday I'll - I'll paint the true Christ. [Now] I paint the tombs of the prophets. I help people look up from those pews and dream. They look up and they imagine if they lived back in Christ time, they wouldn't have done what the others did. They wouldn't have murdered those whom we now adore. I paint all this suffering, but I don't suffer myself. I make a living of it.
    - The people didn't want scenes of the crucifixion and about how we're called to have faith in Christ to choose him over Barabbas at the pain of the gas chamber. They wanted distractions.
    - Most, he charged, want to be admirers of Christ, but not followers, because the life of a true disciple is too demanding.
  - This point was made for me in a powerful way by a Catholic psychiatrist I had as a professor in Rome during a class on the psychology of the family. I forget exactly what the context was but Gianfranco Zuanazzi, who was an incredible lecturer, described what was then a big story in Italian pop culture gossip magazines. Italian porn star. That man was never my student.
  - The point of both of these stories is that it's not enough to know about Jesus, but to know Jesus. To learn from him. To follow him. To imitate him. To enter into communion with him. To allow him to live within.
  - And so we explore how to live as faithful disciples of Jesus today.
- Disciples in every age

- To answer that question, we must first ask what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus in any age. What does it involve. What did it involve with the first disciples?
- Perhaps the best description of what it means to become and grow as a Christian was given by the Aparecida document of the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. The document was supervised by Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, the future Pope Francis. It describes five stages of living as a disciple in every age. Goal is on becoming full stature in Christ, missionary disciples in communion.
  - Encounter Jesus
    - The first two steps are preliminary. But the first begins with meeting Jesus.
    - Andrew and John. Come and See. So many others. The other apostles. Woman at the well. Mary Magdalene. Zacchaeus. Bartimaeus. Nicodemus. Joseph of Arimathea. So many of those Jesus healed. We could even talk about the encounter of the shepherds and the wisemen at the beginning of his life. We could speak about the pagan centurions who met him with faith when he worked a miracle or was present at the foot of the Cross.
    - But not everyone who meets Jesus meets him at the depth Jesus wants. Not everyone meets with faith. The story of the hemorrhaging woman reminds us that many just bump into Jesus. The vast majority of Jews who met him didn't become his disciples. Many today encounter Jesus in one form or another but receive that gift on hardened, rocky or thorny soil that bears little fruit.
    - But encountering Jesus, and meeting him with faith, is the first step. Often disciples meet him through others. Parents and grandparents who pass on their faith. Fellow students at school or university. Meeting one of his disciples.
- Continuous conversion
  - The next step is continuous conversion. We recognize we're called to something more. We want to be more like him. We want a new life that involves Jesus. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew left everything immediately to follow him. Zacchaeus committed to give half his possessions to the poor and to reward four-fold anyone he had defrauded. The woman at the well told everyone about Jesus so that they would come to meet him.
  - Conversion is not just a minor course correction in our life. It's not even the elimination of a bad habit or the acquisition of a new one. It's a death and resurrection. It's receiving the offer of a new life from him who is the way, truth, resurrection and life. It's to make Jesus the fundamental criterion of our existence.
  - For some, this is an instant revolution. For most, it's a gradual process.
  - But this, too, is what precedes true discipleship. It's a decision not to live as everyone else is living. Not to think as everyone else is thinking. Not to buy what everyone else buys. Not to vote as everyone else votes. But it's a metanoia, a total change of perspective, in which we begin to put on the mind of Christ and seek to grow to love him with all our mind, heart, soul and strength and to begin to love our neighbor as Christ loves us and them.
  - Once we begin to make this decision we're capable of true discipleship.
- Discipleship
  - Disciple in Greek means student and student in Latin means zealous and so we become ardent to be Jesus' pupils. We make a commitment to learn from Jesus not just a bunch of truths and not just the truth but in its fullness the art of living.
  - We see what this meant for the first disciples. They became apprentices of Jesus.
  - They first came to "be with him." They spent time with him. They listened to his teaching, sought to understand it and to live it. Jesus was forming them to be able to be the echoes and the examples of that teaching. He wanted to help them learn to receive it on good and rich soil and bear fruit, 30, 60, 100 ways or more. He would send them out, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to teach everything he had commanded them. "He who hears you, hears me."
  - They followed him. They literally shared in his life and ministry. They were eye witnesses to his miracles of healing, exorcism, multiplication of food, calming stormy seas and raising the

dead. They went with him to Jerusalem. They went with him through Galilee and Judea. They went with him into the pagan Decapolis and the northern cities of Tyre and Sidon. He who had called them to follow him literally followed him on the outside so that they might learn how to follow him on the inside. Everything Jesus did, as he said during the Last Supper, was as an example, so that as he had done, so they would do. When Peter objected to Jesus' first prophetic announcement that he would be betrayed, handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, mocked, crucified, and killed, Jesus told him, "Get behind me, Satan," because Peter was trying to *lead* Jesus, not follow him. Jesus calls all of us as his disciples to follow him, too, to love as he loves, be merciful as he is merciful, to be holy like he is holy.

- Begin to be formed in a community.
  - Koinonia. Jesus came to found a family, a Mystical Body.
  - Even when we're lost, solitary sheep, Jesus came to bring us back to the fold. He wants to save not just individual members of the family, but the family.
  - He taught us to pray, "Our" Father, and incentivized our prayer in common, promising "Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." He prayed that we would be one just as He and the Father are one, so that the world may know that God the Father sent the Son and loves us just like he loves the Son. He focused on the importance of the Church in fraternal correction as a last resort. He came to form a championship team, of a bunch of people who wouldn't make other people's draft boards. But he wanted to form those who are not wise, powerful, or connected by worldly standards to shame those who are, and to do so together.
  - The example of the early Church. They had all things in common. They prayed together. Ate together. Went up on pilgrimage to Jerusalem together. And that communion had an evangelical attraction that draw many others to them. They knew they were more related to each other by Christ's blood than I am to my identical twin by genes.
  - For some Christians, this is a reality that is hard to live. They prefer to be loners, whether out of shyness, excessive introversion, self-pity, or something else. Some feel ostracized because of a personal characteristic or something they've done. But Christ wants our social nature that he created to flourish in the Church.
  - This is in the context of the work of the devil. Jesus gives a parable of a sower who sows good seed in his fields but then an enemy comes to sow weeds. The devil is constantly at work to divide us, just like he did Adam and Eve, from God, from each other, from interior unity and integrity. We see this reality in the Church from the beginning. How he successfully tempted Judas to betray Christ, even though he had been with him for three years, even though he had heard all his preaching and seen all his incredible miracles. He divided so many Jews from their long-awaited Messiah and so many people from the Jews and the saving work and revelation God had entrusted to them for the sake of the whole human race. Over the course of the centuries, he has divided the Church through various heresies and schisms, especially the schism between East and West in 1054 and the schism in the West in 1517 with the Protestant Reformation. The devil continues that work of trying to divide us from God, each other, and within us. We see it in all of the adjectival Catholicism we encounter, a diversity that doesn't enrich but divides, when people enter into various camps, whether traditional, progressive, TLM, novus ordo, in which the Church of God is more divided even than Italian politics. It's essential for us, as Christ disciples, to seek the communion he intends.
  - Concrete realities of the parish, the Diocese and the universal church.
    - What a great gift you have to have this parish dedicated to Our Lady of Grace! It's a thriving, growing parish, with so many ways to grow in faith. I'm sure there are some people who are harder to integrate, who can be divisive in criticisms or in their bearing, who give into gossip, who seek to erect their own silos. But this is supposed to be a microcosm of what Christ intended for his Church, a real family of faith.

- Koinonia must be shown in the zeal with which we invite and welcome. It must be shown in how we strive to work together, even if we might not initially or ever see eye to eye. It must be witnessed in how we pray together and for each other, support each other to do the Lord's work, accompany others through the dark valleys, and celebrate each other's joys.
- That type of communion is meant to extend, spiritually and concretely, to the Diocese of Charleston and the universal Church. How does this parish pray for and support the intentions and charitable works of Bishop Fabre-Jeune? How does it show up for and participate in major diocesan events? At a universal level, do we support the charitable works of the Holy Father and the work of the Vatican through Peter's Pence? Do we pray for the Holy Father and for his collaborators. There are many who criticize the Pope and some of his coworkers, and sometimes the criticism can be warranted. But the question I always ask is whether those who are criticizing are praying at least as much, or, better, twice or ten times as much. Constructive criticism is appropriate. We call it fraternal correction. But to be done well, such fraternal correction needs to be drenched in prayer and sacrifice. And often what's given is not fraternal correction, but straight out complaining and destructive criticism. I also have to say that it's super important for us to remember that the Church is a family, brought into existence, willed and sustained by God. We all have a role in the family, for its health, for its mood. Sometimes we can have people in the family who upset us, whose words and actions are contrary to the Gospel and undermine the faith. When this happens, we need to pray for them and, at the right time and in the right way, seek to call them higher. But most of us would never attack our family members in the newspaper or on public blogs or worse. Even if the person deserves the criticism, that's not the way to do it. Not only would it expose the family to ridicule, but it would divide the family more. Why would this be any different in the Church? Just as a family doesn't benefit from using public forums to vent against their father, mother or grandfather, so similarly it doesn't help the Church. Such public criticism that divides the Church and scandalizes many others only hurts the Church. And if there are officials in the Vatican, or in a Diocese, or in a Parish, who do crazy things, then we have to be careful in how we respond, so that we do so with Christ like love.
- So building up communion through our prayer, through the way we treat each other — "by [love] will they know that you are my disciples" — through our invitations, our hospitality, our mutual support and affection, is the fourth step in our Christian growth.

#### ○ Mission

- The final stage is sharing what we've received.
- St. Mark tells us that Jesus summoned the twelve so that they could be with him and so that he could send them out. He formed them as disciples in communion and then sent them out. We see him send out the 12 apostles with his authority to teach and heal. We see him later send out the 72 disciples, probably the 12 apostles and sixty lay people. It's a sign that he wants to send all of us out.
- Once we've come truly to encounter Christ, to leave behind our own ways and adopt the way of Christian virtue, once we've enrolled in his school and been strengthened by the communion of saints in the communion of the Church, then we can't keep that gift to ourselves. We yearn to share what we've found.
- Pope Francis' words from EG.
  - (264) "What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known?"
  - (265) "We have a treasure of life and love that cannot deceive, and a message that cannot mislead or disappoint." It ennobles us and is never out of date. This infinite

love cures our infinite sadness.

- (266) “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. ...We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. This is why we evangelize.”
- We are passing on living water to those who are thirsty, the bread of life to those who are hungry, the light of the world to those in darkness, the medicine of immorality to those who are sick. We are passing on a blessing not a curse, a gift not a liability.
- Yet, why do so many of us hesitate?
  - Many of us think it's a burden rather than a blessing. We've assimilated it more as a list of to dos, many of which we don't like, rather than a new life with God.
  - We're often afraid of what others might say or think about us.
  - We recognize our own defects and don't want to be put out into the full light of the Christian faith lest others see those defects too.
  - We don't reflect on the stakes involved, not just happiness in this world, but happiness forever.
  - We often don't love others enough to take the risk of being misunderstood. St. Therese's response to why there were so many non-Christians 1800+ years after Christ: because of the laziness and lack of love of Christians.
  - We don't feel trained and capable to be able to respond to the foreseeable obstacles.
- So part of our living as disciples is learning how to do it most effectively. To do it first and foremost for our children in our families and in our parish family. Then to do it for those with whom we interact, our neighbors, fellow students, coworkers. Then to keep spreading it outward. Jesus calls us to proclaim the Gospel to every creature. So no one is an exception.
- Emmaus scene. Pope Francis.
  - Enter into their journey, rather than just mouth words.
  - Relate it to what God has revealed.
  - Recognize that the reason why people leave contain the seed of their return.
- Evangelizing in depth. Ratzinger 2000.
  - **To evangelize means: to show this path—to teach the art of living.** ... This is why we are in need of a new evangelization—if the art of living remains an unknown, nothing else works.
  - We can see a progressive process of de-Christianization and a loss of the essential human values, which is worrisome. **A large part of today's humanity does not find the Gospel in the permanent evangelization of the Church: That is to say, the convincing response to the question: How to live?** This is why we are searching for, along with permanent and uninterrupted and never to be interrupted evangelization, **a new evangelization, capable of being heard by that world that does not find access to 'classic' evangelization.** Everyone needs the Gospel; the Gospel is destined to all and not only to a specific circle and this is why we are obliged to look for new ways of bringing the Gospel to all.
- Method
  - Prayer
    - Ratzinger: “Jesus had to acquire the disciples from God. The same is always true. We ourselves cannot gather men. We must acquire them by God for God. All methods are empty without the foundation of prayer. The word of the announcement must always be drenched in an intense life of prayer.
    - We need prayer for others we're trying to evangelize.
    - We also need prayer for ourselves, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

- St. Therese, co-patroness of the missions, prayed
- Witness
  - RM 42: “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission.
  - Life is the first form of witness, showing a new way of living. Especially concern for people, particularly the poor, weak and those who suffer, to peace.
  - Has to be joyful, even when others are not expecting joy. Paul VI said that people will not hear the Good News “from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world
- Friendship
  - EN 46. The Lord often used it (for example, with Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, Simon the Pharisee), and so did the apostles. In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?
- Sharing of Jesus
  - RM 44: Evangelization will always contain--as the foundation, center and at the same time the summit of its dynamism--a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ...salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy.”
- Invitation
  - Have they ever thought about becoming Catholic?
  - One at a time. Most times it is fishing with a rod rather than a big net.
  - “Come and see.”
  - What an incredible gift to bring one person to Christ.
- Not being afraid to preach the hard stuff
  - Cross, like with disciples in Emmaus
  - Judgment, and the importance of our choices.
  - To address the “thorns” in the soil. Called to confront problem of evil, humanity of the Church, three-fold concupiscence of materialism, hedonism and controlling individualism, the eyes, the flesh and pride of life. Or the world, the flesh and the devil.
  - Knowing where to turn to help them find more
- Living as Disciples Today
  - Some when they think about living faithfully as disciples today, becoming truly missionary disciples in communion, they think about the challenges today and believe that it's harder today than it was 25, 50, 100 years ago. Some think that there are even historic challenges that believers before have never faced, making it harder to live and share the faith. There are indeed many challenges today.
    - Secularism, living as if God doesn't exist. Many are practical atheists, regardless of whether they believe or not.
    - Scientism, a philosophy or religion that stipulates that the only real knowledge is what we can see, hear, touch, taste, smell and observe under a microscope or analyze in some machine. But there are many things, like love, like the soul that distinguished a living body from a corpse, that we cannot quantify or measure in those ways.
    - There's the ubiquity of technology that has pervaded our culture and even our interior life, such that many of us have become slaves to our devices. Algorithms work on our dopamine receptors so much that many of us are addicts to what was supposed to save us time and

make life easier. The AI revolution, now underway, is for sure going to make us more dependent.

- While there has always been the danger of materialism, our consumerist culture has made convinced many that our wants are our needs, and we live in many ways the culture of the grain bin, with people all over the socio-economic ladder becoming hoarders, owned by their stuff.
- While there has always been the danger of hedonism and what St. John called the lust of the flesh, the sexual revolution, after Freud, Kinsey and Heffner, have made chastity rather than lust the problem, so that many people are now addicted to porn and other sexual sins. The devil is not stupid. He knows that the greatest way to corrupt the image and likeness of God in us, of God who is love, is by changing us from lovers to lusters, from protectors to predators, from those who sacrifice for others to those who sacrifice others for our gratification. The confusion about sex as a verb has led to confusion about sex as a noun, which has led to an anthropological crisis that impacts our understanding not just about what it means to be a woman or a man, not just about love and marriage, but also about God who took on our humanity.
- While there have always been scandals in the Church, from Judas Iscariot onward, the clergy sexual abuse scandals — both priests who perversely abused rather than protected and died for those entrusted by Christ to them — and by chancery officials who didn't do all that it took to confront and excise this moral cancer from the Mystical Body has dramatically impacted trust in the Church. It remains the punchline for anti-Catholic late night comedians looking for a cheap laugh, and may remain so until Christ comes again. It's the excuse those who were resisting conversion were looking for to justify their lack of practice.
- There are others we can ponder, like threats to religious freedom, a lack of respect for the rights of conscience, political manipulation of the faith toward worldly and even sinful ends, but the point is clear. While there are always obstacles confronting the faithful in every age, there are several that we confront today that are noteworthy.
- We've seen the results in decreasing numbers of attendance in parishes, schools, programs across the country and in many of the developed countries of the world. Two days ago, on Jan. 24, the Pew Research Center published the results of a survey that showed that “nones” — those who respond to “none of the above” or “nothing in particular” when asked what religion they are or practice — continue to grow. In 2007, they were just 17 percent of the US population. Now they are 28 percent, surpassing Catholics who for a long time have held steady at 24 percent of the population but are now just 20, and likewise taking a chunk from Protestants, who have normally been just over 50 percent of the population but are now just 40. The reasons given by the nones for their response are important for us to know and confront:
  - 17 percent say they're atheist, 20 percent agnostic. *They need reasons for God's existence.*
  - But 69 percent say they still believe in God, even though only 13 percent the God of the Bible. *They have often been persuaded, like students, that Christians believe that creation happened in 144 hours, that Eve was formed literally out of Adam's rib, and other things that they believe have been scientifically disproven.*
  - 49 percent say they are spiritual. *There's still a desire for God, albeit on their own terms.*
  - 47 percent don't like religious organizations. *The institutionalization has become an obstacle rather than, for them, a help.*
  - 30 percent had bad experiences with religious people. *Vatican II says that the greatest reason for atheism is not that arguments for atheism but the bad example of Christians.*
  - 43 percent say that religion does more harm than good. *They think about the crusades, the inquisition, the scandals, and today there is a concerted effort to try to pretend that the Church is misogynist, homophobic, neurotic and worse.*
  - 60 percent question a lot of religious teachings. *They have questions for which they haven't received compelling answers.*

- 45 percent say they don't have time or need it. *They don't see the difference it makes.*
- Modern resources
  - But while there clearly are challenges today, there are also incredible resources we have at our reach.
  - We have the resources Christians in every age have.
    - God himself and his grace.
    - The Word of God
    - The Sacraments
    - The teaching of the Church
    - The lives of the saints. The intercession of the saints and angels.
    - The treasure of beauty the Church has produced.
  - But there are some special resources we have today.
  - For all its issues in implementation at a time of the Vietnam War and the Sexual Revolution, the Second Vatican Council prepared the Church to give a reason for the hope that's within it to the world. It's hard to say that the Church is a medieval institution, backward, still in the dark ages, etc.
  - The post-Vatican II papacies have instilled the Church with confidence to go out into the world, not to be afraid to open the doors to Christ, to know that Christ is the answer, to lead with inspiring charity. The confidence that has come from Vatican II and the modern papacy of not retreating from the world like some form of so-called "Benedict Option" against the Church's summons to be salt, light and leaven, but going forward.
  - We now have access at our fingertips, ears and eyes to incredible resources for faith formation. Not just because we have immediate access to everything that comes from the Vatican and our Bishops, but also to the writings of the saints, the fathers and doctors of the Church, and more.
  - We have the Augustine Institute, Word on Fire, Ascension, Dynamic Catholic, Books, Websites, Podcasts, Youtube videos and more. I'm confident in saying that there's never been a time when it's been easier to deepen our faith and to have resources to help nourish others.
  - The media is an incredible tool by which to reach people far and wide. I think about the rise of Bishop Erik Varden, Bishop of Trondheim, Norway. Who would ever have known of him except in this age? My daily homilies are normally read or listened to by people in every U.S. State and in more than 50 countries. I'm sure Fr. Kirby's books, articles and videos have an even wider reach.
- We need to keep these assets very much in mind.
  - The Parable of the weeds and the wheat. The disciples were worried about the weeds. The key is to focus on the growth of the wheat. Christ wants us to concentrate on the growth of the wheat. There are a lot of weeds to be sure, but they can't really stop the growth of the wheat. Each one of us just needs to be good and rich soil in response to what he gives and to help others diagnosis any hardened, rocky or thorny soil so that they might bear good ruit too.
- At a concrete level, what must we do?
  - Father Kirby has generously decided to give out free copies of my book, Plan of Life, after the talk tonight.
  - In it I try to focus on how to live faithfully as a Christian disciple today.
  - The whole notion of a Plan of Life is to keep communion with God alive at all times. If Christ is with us, if God is for us, who can be against us?, St. Paul asks. We may be martyred and crucified but we cannot be defeated. So the most important thing is to keep our communion with God. For that we need to have a plan.
  - In almost every sphere of life, those who take something seriously come up with a plan:
    - Championship sports teams



- Flourishing businesses
  - Triumphant political campaigns
  - Successful individuals in almost any sphere of life
- Those who get results are generally the ones with better plans implemented with perseverance.
- It's true, too, of the spiritual life, which is way too important to wing.
- Jesus spoke about how we need a training regimen, or plan, to grow in the spiritual life: "No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when *fully trained*, every disciple will be like his teacher." (Lk 6:40)
- Saint Paul specialized in providing training in the Christian life. His letters are full of advice from an expert coach in the spiritual life.
- Paul exhorted parents to raise their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" and he provided the same training for his spiritual children (Eph 6:4).
- He urged the young Saint Timothy, "Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." (1 Tim 4:7–8).
- He followed his own advice, telling the Corinthians, "I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified." (1 Cor 9:26–27).
- A plan involves two essential elements:
  - The goal
  - The adequate means to obtain that goal
- In the spiritual life, what is the goal?
  - It's holiness!
  - To become holy as God is holy.
  - To become like God, growing fully in his image and likeness.
  - Since God is love: to receive God's love and to love as he loves.
  - A spiritual plan of life without this goal of holiness is to embark on a journey to the wrong destination!
  - St. John Paul II wrote about this goal in 2001 in his pastoral plan for the third Christian millennium (*Novo millennio ineunte*):
    - "I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness."
    - "Stressing holiness remains more than ever an urgent pastoral task."
    - "It is necessary to rediscover the full practical significance of ... the universal call to holiness."
    - "All the Christian faithful, of whatever state or rank, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity."
    - "It would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity."
    - "The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living."
  - Pope Francis spoke of the same goal in *Gaudete et Exsultate*
    - "The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence."
    - "Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them the middle class of holiness."
    - "Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church."
    - "We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves."

- “In the Church, holy yet made up of sinners, you will find everything you need to grow towards holiness. The Lord has bestowed on the Church the gifts of scripture, the sacraments, holy places, living communities, the witness of the saints and a multifaceted beauty that proceeds from God’s love.”
- “Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self.”
- “Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. *Mt* 5:3-12; *Lk* 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives. The word ‘happy’ or ‘blessed’ thus becomes a synonym for ‘holy.’”
- In addition to being poor in spirit, empathetic, meek, hungry for holiness, merciful, pure of heart, peacemaking and faithful when persecuted, he also spoke about various “signs of holiness”: perseverance, patience, meekness, joy, a sense of humor, boldness and passion, a community spirit, prayerfulness, vigilant, ready to fight the good fight and discerning,
- “It is my hope that ... the whole Church [will] devote herself anew to promoting the desire for holiness. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God’s greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us.”
- John Paul II stressed the means
  - “The paths to holiness are personal and call for a **genuine training in holiness** adapted to people’s needs.”
  - He underlines six pillars of holiness:
    - The primacy of grace (God’s free action)
    - Prayer — “This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the *art of prayer*.”
    - The Sunday Eucharist —
    - The Sacrament of Reconciliation
    - Listening to the Word of God
    - Proclaiming the Word of God
- Integrating those pillars into one’s life and receiving all of the help God wants to give us by means of them requires effort!
  - A Plan of Life is a unified series of commitments we make to grow in holiness.
  - It’s a “game plan” for our spiritual life to help us achieve the goal.
  - It involves various spiritual exercises given to us by saints and spiritual directors to help us translate our desire to grow closer to God from vague wish to reality
  - It helps us to keep a full-time awareness of God — and how he is trying to help us — throughout the day.
  - It is a means by which we seek to live in God’s kingdom, to follow Jesus, and to cooperate with the Holy Spirit.
- In *Plan of Life*, I describe and develop a series of different practices to help one keep an awareness of God throughout the day, to abide in him and allow him to abide in us (Jn 15:4)
  - The book is divided into two parts: the “basics” and “beyond the basics.”
  - I list the following 12 fundamental practices:
    - The Holy Spirit
    - Heroic moment
    - Morning Offering
    - General Exam

- Regular Prayer
- Sacred Scripture
- Keeping Holy the Lord's Day — Sabbath.
- Frequent Confession
- Adoration — Eucharistic Revival
- Charity — Tithe at the parish
- Holy Week
- Rosary
- Beyond the Basics
  - Daily Mass
  - Spiritual Communion
  - Angelus/Regina Caeli
  - Memorare
  - Saturday devotions to Mary
  - Virtue of Penance
  - Fasting
  - Order and Organization
  - Particular Exam
  - Work
  - Study
  - Spiritual Reading
  - Retreat and Days of Recollection
  - Acts of the Heart (Faith, Hope, Love, Presence of God, Divine Filiation, Thanksgiving, Atonement)
  - Aspirations
  - Christian Joy
- What I've given is not an exhaustive list of helpful spiritual practices and exercises, but they cover the essential elements.
- Knowing and listing them is easy; putting them into practice is what is the challenge. No one can do everything at once. Choose one or a few of these practices and begin to form new habits. Once they become part of your "second nature," move on to others. Be patient and persevere.
- Jesus said, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them" (Jn 13:17).
- That's one way to live as a disciple of the Lord.
- Conclusion
  - Here at Our Lady of Grace, we are privileged to have the example and intercession of Our Lady.
    - She is a model disciple of her Son. She sought God. She found him. She loved him. And she loved his will. Her life was a desire to do the will of the Lord, even and especially when it was a challenge, as when her maternal heart was pierced at seeing her son suffering.
    - She is a mother of every disciple. In the third annunciation, Jesus himself said to her, "Mother, behold your Son," and to every beloved disciple, "Behold your mother." She wants to raise us to be good disciples of her Son: to encounter him, to turn with him in life, to learn from him and follow him, to become good spiritual siblings of all her other spiritual sons and daughters, and to go out with haste, like she did after the Annunciation, to bring Jesus to others, so that Jesus can make them like just as he did John the Baptist.
    - She is the principal intercessor with her Son, so that we may have all the grace necessary to be good disciples. At Cana, she intervened with Jesus even before the couple knew they needed help. She's interceding for us even before we know how we most need God's assistance. But we thank her for all the graces she obtains for us. And we specifically ask her

to intercede so that we may never be merely an admirer of Jesus, but a zealous apprentice, a faithful follower and ardent apostle, a missionary disciple in communion. For this intention, we ask: “Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary!”

- Our Lady of Grace, pray for us!