

OUR JOYFUL ENCOUNTER WITH THE LORD



LIVING THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

In the summer of 2017, the U.S. Bishops and diocesan leaders from across the country gathered in Florida. Listening to each other, we sensed the Holy Spirit calling us to a time of urgent renewal. As I thought about how to bring that urgency and renewal to the Archdiocese of St. Louis, my mind went back to Pope Francis' exhortation "The Joy of the Gospel." The reflection on these pages is the introduction to a series on living the joy of the Gospel in St. Louis. Subsequent sections will be published in December, February and April.

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Something has to change. Everyday, our news is full of stories of hatred, violence and a clearly divided nation. It's easy to look around at everything that's wrong in the world and not know where to begin. Let me suggest that we begin with the one thing most in our control: us.

Even in the midst of the obvious hurt, confusion and even despair among our brothers and sisters, we can be a people of hope — a hope that's rooted in our redeemer and the gift of life that He offers us.

The first and best way to maintain our hope, and to spread hope to

others, is to encounter Jesus. I echo the invitation of Pope Francis in the beginning of his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” (“Evangelii Gaudium”):

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord.’” (“Evangelii Gaudium” 3)

What a profound invitation! The Holy Father gives us an essential reminder: whether we have been on this journey of discipleship for many years or we are just beginning, we can only continue on our path if we are willing to encounter Jesus anew each day. Even when we don’t feel ready for the encounter, we can create room in our hearts and let Jesus do the rest.

An encounter with Jesus cannot help but change us, just as it did for Matthew the tax collector, Mary Magdalene, Zaccheus and so many more. Jesus didn’t allow them to let their sinful pasts hold them back. Their pasts simply became an occasion for Him to demonstrate His rich mercy. He can do the same for each of us. And, building on us, He can do the same for our city, our country and our world.

This first step of encountering Jesus, then, will transform our world, for “if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (“Evangelii Gaudium” 8) When we begin to share this love in meaningful ways with everyone with whom we come in contact, the world is a better place and we have done our part to help overcome the despair that is prevalent in our society. Imagine the power of the more than 500,000 Catholics in the Archdiocese of St. Louis living this way.

I invite each of us to consider this daily encounter in our own lives and to reflect upon how we may foster this encounter in the lives of those around us: our family, our neighbors, our parishes. If we hope to truly live and share the joy of the Gospel in St. Louis, we must begin with encountering the living Gospel, Jesus Christ. It’s one small step that will have a lasting impact on us and all with whom we share our lives.

How to Encounter

While there are many ways we can encounter Jesus, two of the most basic ways have a long standing tradition in the Church: Word and Sacrament.

St. Jerome is famously quoted as saying “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” How many of us know the Scriptures as well as we should?

The first step in getting to know Christ through the Scriptures is simply to read the Gospels. There are 89 chapters in the 4 Gospels. If you read one chapter a day you’ll finish in three months. If you begin again, you can read them all through four times in a year. If you continue to do this, the Word of Christ will penetrate your heart and life.

In addition, as an aid to understanding the Scriptures, a great variety of dynamic Scripture study tools are readily available online.

Participating in the Eucharist at Mass and through Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is another central way to encounter Christ. This encounter unites us with Christ and the Church around the world and history through the communion of saints.

Many times, in order to encounter the Lord, it helps to step out of our daily routine and create time and space for the Lord to speak to us. This is why retreats are an important and transformative part of the Christian life. Many parishes host ACTS retreats, or offer silent retreats to help foster encounters with the Lord.

Do not wait! As Pope Francis reminds us, this encounter must be daily; I implore you to accept the same invitation Jesus gave to the disciples “Come and you will see.” If we’re willing to encounter the Lord, He will transform our hearts, our parishes and our world.

This booklet is a reprint of the introduction to a series of reflections on living the joy of the Gospel in St. Louis by Archbishop Robert J. Carlson.

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