

**Homily for the Diocesan Youth Conference
Carlinville**

**The Fifth Sunday of Lent - Year C
March 16, 2013**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we hear so very often from the media and from many others that the Catholic Church is “out of touch,” “irrelevant,” and that “no one listens to the Church.” In these recent days we have seen these claims proved false. Could any other religion or any political organization focus the attention of the entire world on a small chimney and a seagull perched atop it? If the Church were in fact “irrelevant” and if in fact “no one listened to her,” the world would not have focused on that chimney as most of you no doubt did.

Because of her moral teachings - which the Church has not made herself but received from Jesus Christ - the Church is often accused of being “behind the times.” In answer to this charge, G. K. Chesterton was said:

Christianity is always out of fashion because it is always sane; and all fashions are mild insanities. When Italy is mad on art the Church seems too Puritanical; when England is mad on Puritanism the Church seems too artistic. When you quarrel with us now you class us with kingship and despotism; but when you quarreled with us first it was because we would not accept the divine despotism of Henry VIII. The Church always seems to be behind the times, when it is really beyond the times; it is waiting till the last fad shall have seen its last summer. It keeps the key of a permanent virtue.

Together with Saint Paul, we cannot cling to the things of this world or the standards of the world; rather, we must say with the Apostle: “forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

This is the mindset that has allowed Pope Francis to hold fast to the truth of Jesus Christ and to love the poor with the heart of the Lord. It is this same mindset that each of us must discover if we are to be faithful disciples of the one who says to us, “Go, and from now on do not sin anymore” (John 8:11).

The only way that we can follow this command of the Lord is if we “know him and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). To know Jesus Christ! Is this not the purpose of this Year of Faith? Is this not the mission of the Church? Is this not the aim of each of our lives? If we do not have Jesus Christ, we have nothing. The woman in today’s Gospel who was caught in adultery came to know the Lord in a personal way through the forgiveness of her sins. The Lord waits for us each of us, dear friends, in the Sacrament of Confession. I urge you to encounter Him there. If you feel shame at confessing your sins, you can join your shame to the shame that Jesus felt on the cross as he hung there half-naked dying for our sins. Open your hearts to Him. Speak to Him of your thoughts and desires, your hopes and dreams, your failings and shortcomings. Speak to Him as a friend and you will know Him and find the joy for which you long.

The more you come to know Jesus Christ, the more you will want others to know Him, as well. It will become your personal mission to help others encounter Him and to know him as you do. This is the mission of everyone who has been baptized into Christ.

When he celebrated the Holy Mass with the Cardinal Electors in the Sistine Chapel the day after his election to the See of Peter, Pope Francis said, “We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO [Non Governmental Organization], but not the Church, the Bride of the Lord.”¹

You, dear young people, must reach out to your peers in particular and intentional way to show them that the Church is not irrelevant to their hopes and dreams. You must help them see that in the Church, in which is born a relationship with Jesus Christ, they will find the fulfilment of their greatest aspirations. You must show them the joy of knowing Jesus and in living close to him.

Throughout this Diocesan Youth Conference, you have reflected on this mission with Father Leo Patalinghug, to whom I express my gratitude. I thank each of you for your participation this weekend and for your desire to grow in the knowledge and the practice of the faith. The Church needs you to help fulfil the Great Commission entrusted to her by the Lord.

The words of the Lord, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,” are addressed not to a few of us, but to each one of us (Matthew

28:19). As we set out on this journey to help others know Jesus Christ, we must keep our eyes fixed always on him. We must not allow ourselves to be distracted, and we should not be afraid to speak of the Lord and of his love. Yesterday, Pope Francis said:

Christian truth is attractive and convincing because it responds to the deep need of human existence, announcing in a convincing way that Christ is the one Savior of the whole of man and of all men. This announcement is as valid today as it was at the beginning of Christianity when the Church worked for the great missionary expansion of the Gospel.²

The more that people see the Christian truth lived by us in our daily lives the more attractive it will be and the more convincing our witness will be.

Let us ask the Immaculate Conception to intercede for us with her Son, that he will draw us close to himself and make us fruitful witnesses to his love and evangelizers of his truth.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, Homily, March 14, 2013.

² Pope Francis, Address to the College of Cardinals, March 15, 2013.