



# Put Out into the Deep: Living Our Call to Holiness



November 1, 2010  
Solemnity of All Saints,

Dear Brother Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Women and Men, Members of the Lay Faithful,

## 1 “Put Out into the Deep!”

“Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch!” (Lk 5:4). Trusting in Jesus’ words, Simon Peter and his companions, who had labored all night and caught nothing, cast their nets. “When they had done so, they caught a great number of fish” (Lk 5:6). Astonished by this abundant catch, and obedient to Jesus’ word, they abandoned their nets and followed him.



Bishop Coakley

Echoing these same words at the dawn of the new millennium Pope John Paul II summoned the Church to set out anew on the vast ocean of history relying on the help of Christ. “*Duc in altum!*” These words invite us at this new and challenging moment in our own history, to remember the past with gratitude, to live in the present with enthusiasm and look to the future with confidence, for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13:8). (Pope John Paul II, *Novo*

*Millennio Ineunte*, 1)

In 2004, when appointed by Pope John Paul II as the Tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Salina, I chose this same gospel mandate as my episcopal motto, “*Duc in altum!*” (Put out into the deep!) It serves as the guiding principle of my ministry as bishop and a constant reminder that what the Lord asks each of us is obedience to his word and generosity in our response to his call.

We are now entering a new and graced moment in our history as the Catholic Church in north central and northwest Kansas. The Lord invites us to “Put out into the deep!” and become partners with him in bringing forth an abundant catch, a rich harvest in holiness, communion and mission.

## 2 “Stewards of Hope”

With this promising, but challenging future opening before us, I have promulgated a new pastoral plan for the Diocese of Salina entitled, “Stewards of Hope.” As its title clearly expresses, our new diocesan plan is an affirmation of hope. It is a response to the Lord’s command to “put out into the deep,” not trusting in ourselves, but in God’s grace and fidelity.

The title of our pastoral plan also acknowledges the central importance we place upon stewardship in our diocese. Christian stewardship provides the lens through which we see the world and all it contains. Everything comes to us as a gift from the hand of God. These gifts are entrusted to us, and we are accountable for how we use them. A Christian steward receives God’s gifts gratefully, cultivates them responsibly, shares them lovingly with others and returns them with increase to the Lord. “Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ leads naturally to the practice of stewardship. These linked realities, discipleship and stewardship, then make up the fabric of a Christian life in which each day is lived in an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord. Being a disciple is not just something else to do, alongside many other things



Raphael’s “The Miraculous Draught of Fishes,” 1515.

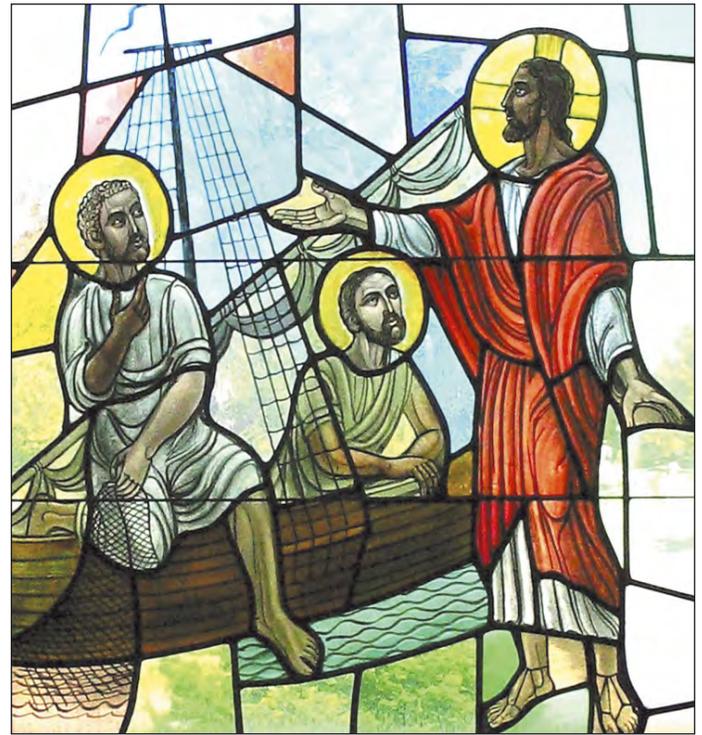
suitable for Christians, it is a total way of life and requires continuing conversion” (USCCB, Stewardship: A Disciples Response, p. 13-14). Stewardship, too, is a way of life that calls us to ongoing conversion and refocuses the way we relate to God, to one another, to the Church and world in which we live, and to all that we have and possess. “As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pt 4:10).

This pastoral plan, “Stewards of Hope”, which will be implemented over the course of the next four years beginning in 2011, is not simply a new program. The program already exists. It is found in the Gospel (especially in the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount) and in the living Tradition of the Church. It is centered in a person, Jesus Christ, who desires to be known, loved and imitated so that sharing with one another his own life in the heart of the Trinity, we can labor with him in his Church to transform history until it reaches fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the pastoral program which is valid for all times and cultures. “Stewards of Hope” adapts this exalted vision to the challenges and opportunities we face in our own particular time and place.

“Stewards of Hope” deliberately sets the whole pastoral plan within the framework of the universal call to holiness. The decision to begin implementation of the plan by focusing on the call to holiness affirms an essential principle of the Christian view of life: the primacy of grace. Jesus warns his disciples in every age, “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

Deep within us, however, we discover a tendency and temptation that always stands ready to undermine every pastoral work and sidetrack every spiritual journey. It is the mistake of thinking that the results depend ultimately on our own ability to plan and to act. This misperception is strongly reinforced by our practical, efficiency-oriented American culture. We pride ourselves on results. We often boast about how busy we are. Our culture is one of continual movement and restlessness, always on the lookout for “the next big thing.” In this environment we run the risk of “doing for the sake of doing”, of putting “doing” before simply “being.”

In contrast to this attitude, the Psalmist says, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). When Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary, Mary sat at his feet listening to his teaching, while Martha busied herself arranging the details of hospitality. Many of us identify with Martha far more readily than with Mary. Yet Jesus gently reproved Martha when she complained that her sister had left her with all of the housework: “You are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful” (Lk 10:41-42). That one



thing is holiness, to become a saint.

The importance of laying a solid foundation for “Stewards of Hope” cannot be overstressed. The universal call to holiness is that solid foundation not only for our pastoral plan but for the life of every baptized person. Holiness is God’s work. His grace comes first. It is God’s gift. We are responsible as good stewards of the gift, however, to receive the gift gratefully. But then the gift becomes our task. We have to cultivate the gift that it may bear abundant fruit. Our response is necessary, but secondary. Pope John Paul II said, “When this principle is not respected, is it any wonder that pastoral plans come to nothing and leave us with a disheartening sense of frustration? We then share the experience of the disciples in the Gospel story of the miraculous catch of fish: ‘We have toiled all night and caught nothing’ (Lk 5:5). This is the moment of faith, of prayer, of conversation with God, in order to open our hearts to the tide of grace and allow the word of Christ to pass through us in all its power: *Duc in altum!* On that occasion, it was Peter who spoke the word of faith; ‘At your word I will let down the nets’ ” (NMI 38).

### **3 “This is the will of God, your sanctification.”**

“This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thes 4:3). This truth, so clearly expressed in the Scriptures, is the principle and foundation of the Christian life, of all pastoral planning and pastoral work. It has practical and far-reaching consequences for each individual

Christian, for every household, for every parish community, indeed for the whole Church. God creates us for holiness. God calls us to become saints.

One of the greatest single contributions of the Second Vatican Council was its clear and emphatic presentation of this universal call to holiness. Like the wise steward in the Gospel parable (Mt 13:52) who brings from his storehouse both the old and the new, the Council Fathers re-presented a Gospel truth that has been present from the beginning, though frequently overlooked. Chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) is wholly dedicated to this foundational truth, that all Christians are called to holiness. This conciliar teaching is not merely a spiritual veneer, but the very heart of its teaching on the nature of the Church.

## 4 The Church as Mystery

The Church is clearly more than meets the eye. Though having a visible hierarchical structure, established by Christ upon the foundation of the apostles, the Church is also a “mystery,” that is, a sign and instrument of the unity that God intends for the human race. As such the Church is a people gathered together into the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to share in the very holiness of God, who is love. The Church is a communion of love. “Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us, to make us all ‘one heart and one soul’ ” (Act 4:32) (NMI 42).

The Church’s faith and inner life is expressed outwardly through its rich liturgical and sacramental rites; it is expressed through the sacred art and architecture it has inspired. The living faith of the Church is enshrined in the sacred Scriptures, creeds, dogmas and canons which express and preserve the living Tradition which comes to us from the apostles. The Church’s life is outwardly expressed in a most compelling way, however, through the witness of the saints.

## 5 The Church is Holy

The Church is holy. She belongs to the One who alone is holy, who became man, shed his blood and gave his life to sanctify and redeem her. This intimate communion of the Church with the Holy One is beautifully expressed in the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:32).

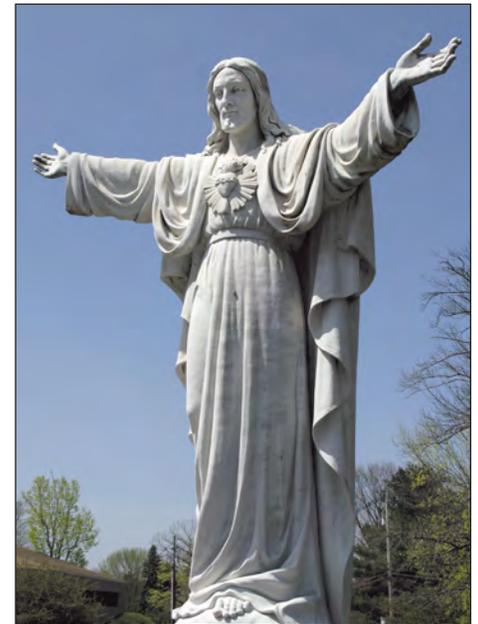
Pope John Paul II wrote in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, “Holiness, whether ascribed to Popes well-known to

history or to humble lay and religious figures, from one continent to another of the globe, has emerged more clearly as the dimension which expresses best the mystery of the Church. Holiness, a message that convinces without the need for words, is the living reflection of the face of Christ” (NMI 7). Holy men and women offer the most credible form of testimony to the truth of the Gospel and teaching of the Church. Though we are often painfully aware of the weakness and sinfulness of the Church’s members, her essential holiness remains one of the Church’s principal and defining marks. As we profess in the Creed: “I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.”

Through baptism into the Church, which is holy, we become holy. We participate in the Church’s holiness. The Sacrament of Baptism begins our initiation into the holiness of God. Through baptism we become living members of the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor 12:12f).

We are incorporated into his Body by the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell within us and make us living stones in his holy temple (1 Pt 2:5). Baptized into Christ’s death, we die to sin. We rise with him from the waters of Baptism, to begin a new life, sharing in the power of his resurrection through his Holy Spirit.

The sacraments are the special channels of grace, established by Christ, that enable us to live this divine life. “The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian’s life of faith” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1210). The Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist) lay the foundation of the Christian life. They incorporate us into Christ and the Church and thereby equip us with the supernatural grace, the virtues and spiritual gifts necessary to grow toward full maturity in Christ as saints.



## 6 “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

When we begin to recognize our high calling we see how utterly unworthy of our dignity it is to settle for a life of moral or spiritual mediocrity and shallow religiosity. The call to baptism is the call to heroic sanctity, the call to become a saint. “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1-3).

“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Our challenge is to embrace and proclaim anew this high standard of ordinary Christian living. Holiness is not the prerogative of an elite few. It is the fundamental vocation which every Christian receives in Baptism. As Vatican II stated clearly, “All Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (LG 40). This is the essence of holiness: perfect love of God and neighbor. This high calling is beyond our mere human strength to realize, but not beyond our hope, “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Pope Benedict writes about this divine source of love in his first encyclical letter. “Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first.

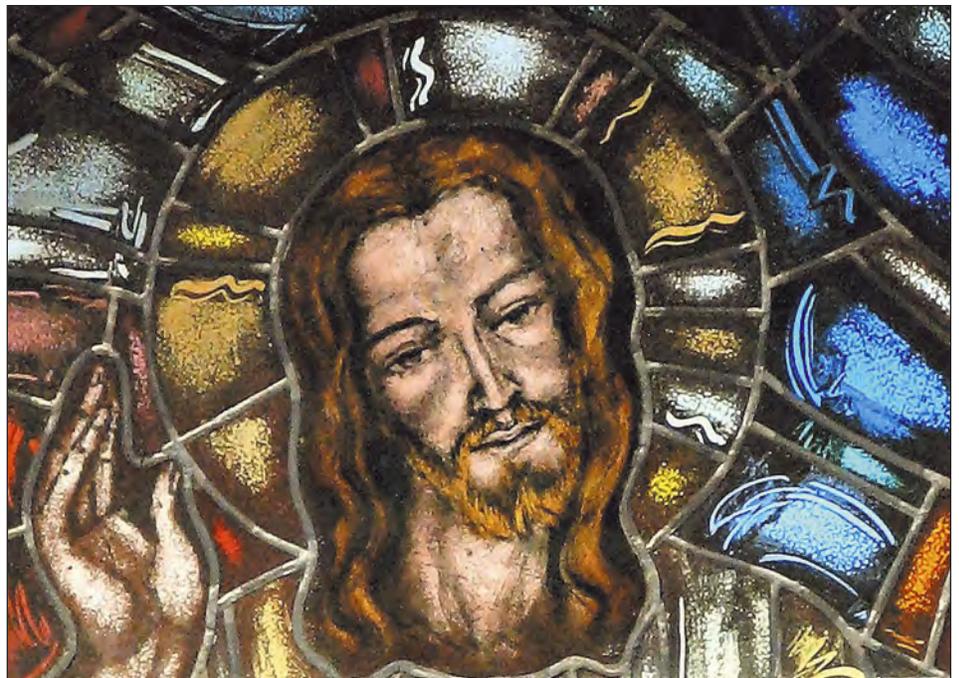
No longer is it a question, then of a ‘commandment’ imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love” (Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, 18). Holiness, too, grows as love is put into action.

Though all Christians are called to holiness (the perfection of charity), the paths of holiness are as personal as the vocation of each individual. The great number of canonizations and beatifications in recent years illustrate these diverse paths. They show us that the saints are ordinary men and women, who are young and old; they are people of every background, vocation, culture and condition of life. They are witnesses

of authentic Christian living to inspire within us a longing for holiness and move us to pursue the heroic path of sanctity. They are models and intercessors to assist us on our own pilgrim journey. “Being a Saint means living close to God, to live in his family” (Pope Benedict XVI, Nov. 1, 2006, All Saints homily).

## 7 “Come, follow me.” (Mt 19:21)

Like the young man who approached Jesus in the Gospel, we may wish to ask, “What must I do to become holy, that is, to inherit eternal life?” (cf. Mt 19:16). As Jesus taught the young man, it begins with keeping the commandments, observing the law. That is foundational for everyone. But is there something more? Yes, there is.



Within the framework of the universal call to holiness, each baptized person receives a unique and particular vocation. This personal vocation specifies the particular path and way of life by which each pursues holiness as a Christian disciple. This vocation is a personal gift from God. A vocation is not a career. Our vocation is not our job. It is a divine calling. Our personal vocation determines in a very practical way how we live our lives as disciples and stewards in order to become the holy men and women God has created us to be. The specific path of holiness appropriate for a monk is not that of a parish priest, which is not that of a young mother, which is not that of a widowed farmer. Holiness is possible for all, but we will grow in holiness by living faithfully and generously the authentic requirements of our own vocation.

Holiness is pursued and realized within the ordinary relationships, circumstances, challenges and duties of each one's personal vocation.

Every vocation from God is both a gift and a task. We have a choice whether to accept or reject the Lord's invitation and plan for our life; whether to follow him, or seek instead to make our own way. Like the rich young man who went away sad when Jesus invited him to sell all and follow him, we can turn away (Mt 19:22).

If we wish to be good stewards of the gift of our vocation we need to prepare ourselves to receive this gift gratefully, respond to God's call generously, and then strive to live it faithfully. Practically speaking this means we have to truly believe that God does have a plan for our life; and then seek to discover what God's plan may be. We have to pray for light, guidance and the freedom and courage to say with Mary, "I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

A vocation, though personal, is not exclusively for the benefit or sanctification of the individual, but always for the good of the Church and ultimately for the glory of God. Each Christian community, therefore, beginning with the family, and certainly including the parish and diocese, ought to do all that it can to foster a climate and culture in which all vocations are valued and discussed as an ordinary topic of conversation and

pastoral concern. There ought to be regular prayer and encouragement for young people to help them remain open to discerning their vocation. They need good role models. Parents, priests, religious, catechists and teachers and others have unique opportunities and responsibilities to support young people through vocational guidance and discernment. Parish vocation committees and other lay organizations can also provide various kinds of support. These initiatives ought to be encouraged and expanded everywhere. The cultivation and promotion of vocations is the responsibility of the whole Church.

There are a variety of Christian vocations within the rich communion of the Church. The mission proper to the lay vocation is to remain in the world and seek the Kingdom of God by transforming the secular world from within and ordering it according to God's plan. Lay persons are leaven in the world through their influence on such spheres as family life, and the worlds of labor, business, politics, education, media and culture.

Though this secular quality is what is distinctive of the lay vocation, some lay men and women dedicate themselves to service within the Church in various forms of lay leadership or lay ecclesial ministry.

Most members of the lay faithful live their vocation in the world as married persons. They are called to a special sacrament of the Church that helps them live this high calling and pursue holiness. The Sacrament of Matrimony unites a Christian man and woman in a sacred covenant that is lifelong, faithful and fruitful and which becomes the foundation for the Christian family. Referring to the family as the domestic church Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church repeatedly affirm the importance of family life and the duties of parents as first educators of their children in the faith. "It is in the bosom of the family that parents are 'by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation'" (LG 11, CCC 1656).

Some men are called by God to ordained ministry in the Church through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Deacons, without sharing in the ministerial priesthood, are ordained to exercise ministry and service in the midst of the Church. Co-workers with the bishop and priests, they assist with the sacred liturgy, serve as heralds of the word and often undertake special works of charity in the name of the Church. Priests, who are co-workers with the bishop, act in the very person of Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church and share his threefold office of teaching, governing and sanctifying the flock entrusted to their care.

The heart of priestly holiness consists in the exercise of pastoral charity, by which priests give themselves over



to the service of their people with the grace and strength provided by Christ, the Good Shepherd. The priest's life is essentially eucharistic. By his essential ministry the priest enables the faithful to exercise fully their common baptismal priesthood through their participation in the eucharistic sacrifice. He renews the sacrifice of Calvary and nourishes the flock each time he offers the Mass for the glory of God and the sanctification of his people. He heals and reconciles them in the Sacraments of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick. The priest is the icon of Christ the Good Shepherd in the midst of his people. As St. John Vianney said, "The priest is not there for himself. He doesn't give absolution to himself; he doesn't administer the sacraments to himself. He is not for himself, he is for you!"

Some women and men are called to consecrated or religious life in the Church. Most consecrated persons are members of religious congregations, but all forms of consecrated life are characterized by the profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. By their lives of witness and service consecrated women and men give testimony to the values of the Kingdom of God already in our midst and direct our attention and hope to its fulfillment in the Heavenly Kingdom.

Among members of the lay faithful there are also many single persons. These remain single for a variety of reasons, sometimes not of their own choosing. Many live their lives, however, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, serving God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. They contribute their unique gifts and perspectives and thereby enrich many. These members of the Church ought to find welcome in the home and family of the Church. "No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who 'labor and are heavy laden' " (*Familiaris Consortio*, 85).

The Church is a communion. "The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ" (NMI 46). This rich variety of vocations within the Church bears witness to this unity in diversity which is rooted in the life of the Holy Trinity. A spirituality rooted in communion enables us to respect and reverence our brothers and sisters within the profound unity of the

Mystical Body, to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God, and to help carry one another's burdens while avoiding the temptation to competition, distrust and jealousy.

## 8 "Lord, teach us to pray!"

Our ability to respond to God's call to become holy requires a "training in holiness" adapted to the needs of each person. This training or formation, drawing from the riches of the Church's spiritual tradition, integrates what is common and available to all with the personal needs and vocation of each individual.

Training in holiness calls for a careful formation in

the art of prayer. Prayer, both personal and communal, enables us to develop the kind of intimate conversation with Christ which is characteristic of genuine friendship. Like Jesus' first disciples, however, we have to learn to pray. We have to be taught: "Lord, teach us to pray!" (Lk 11:1). Pope John Paul II writes, "Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities must become genuine 'schools' of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly 'falls in love' " (NMI 33).

The horizons, heights and depths of authentic Christian prayer are limitless. Once we begin to taste divine intimacy in prayer our hearts will hunger for more and more. "Of you my heart has spoken, seek his face. Your face, Lord, I seek. Hide not your face!" (Ps 27:8-9). Faithfulness to prayer leads us ever more deeply into the eternal dialogue of love between the Father and his Beloved Son under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Christian prayer is a participation in that Trinitarian communication and communion.

Families and parishes, the most basic Christian communities, are to be schools of prayer fostering growth in prayer among each of their members. While education in prayer ought to be a key element in pastoral planning in parishes, our diocesan offices and ministries stand ready to assist and collaborate in supporting such initiatives. Growth in prayer and the spiritual life is greatly assisted by prudent mentors, spiritual guides and the lay ecclesial





movements which are increasingly common today. While not everyone may have access to a spiritual director, we all need the encouragement of wise spiritual friends and companions.

With proper discernment authentic forms of popular piety and personal devotion ought to be strongly encouraged by pastors in both the parish and the home. These ways of prayer touch the heart and engage the Christian imagination in pondering the mysteries of faith. This is especially true regarding the Holy Rosary. Mary's Rosary is a compendium of prayer which fosters meditation and contemplation of the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption.

Training in liturgical prayer is especially important. The life of every parish centers on the celebration of the Eucharist, particularly the Sunday Eucharist. Sunday Mass and the Lord's Day must once again find pride of place in our homes and parishes. At a time when many parish communities in the diocese are experiencing an aging and declining population it is more important than ever to recognize the Sunday Eucharist as the source of our unity. The same can be said regarding the challenge of maintaining our Catholic identity in an increasingly hostile secular environment. The precious value of the Sunday Eucharist shines forth as one of the distinguishing elements of our identity and the true source of our life and strength as faithful Catholics. The gathering of the parish community and the family to worship together on the Lord's Day strengthens both, and helps prevent the scattering of the flock. It is the privileged place where communion is both proclaimed and nourished.

Each of us individually and all of us together draw life

from the heavenly banquet that Christ has prepared for us. "Sunday, the Lord's Day, is a favorable opportunity to draw strength from him, the Lord of life. The Sunday precept is not, therefore, an externally imposed duty, a burden on our shoulders. On the contrary, taking part in the Celebration, being nourished by the Eucharistic Bread and experiencing the communion of their brothers and sisters in Christ is a need for Christians, it is a joy; Christians can thus replenish the energy they need to continue on the journey we must make every week" (Pope Benedict XVI, May 29, 2005, Closing Homily, Italian National Eucharistic Congress). We owe it to the Lord, to one another and to ourselves to participate fully and regularly in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. Every effort must be made to rediscover and preserve the importance of the Lord's Day as a day of worship, a day of rest, and a day for family.

The eucharistic liturgy, the Mass, is enhanced and extended when the parish gathers to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. Many parishes, families and individuals have discovered the riches of the Liturgy of the Hours as a way of entering more deeply into the liturgical seasons and to give structure and rhythm to their prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours enables us to join our hearts and voices in praying with and for the entire Church through Christ our High Priest.

Eucharistic adoration is a treasure which has been rediscovered in our time. In its various forms, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament allows the faithful to prolong the act of adoration which the Church offers to the Father through Christ and in the Holy Spirit at every Mass. Adoration is the most basic and proper act of a creature toward the Creator. We have a need and a duty to adore.

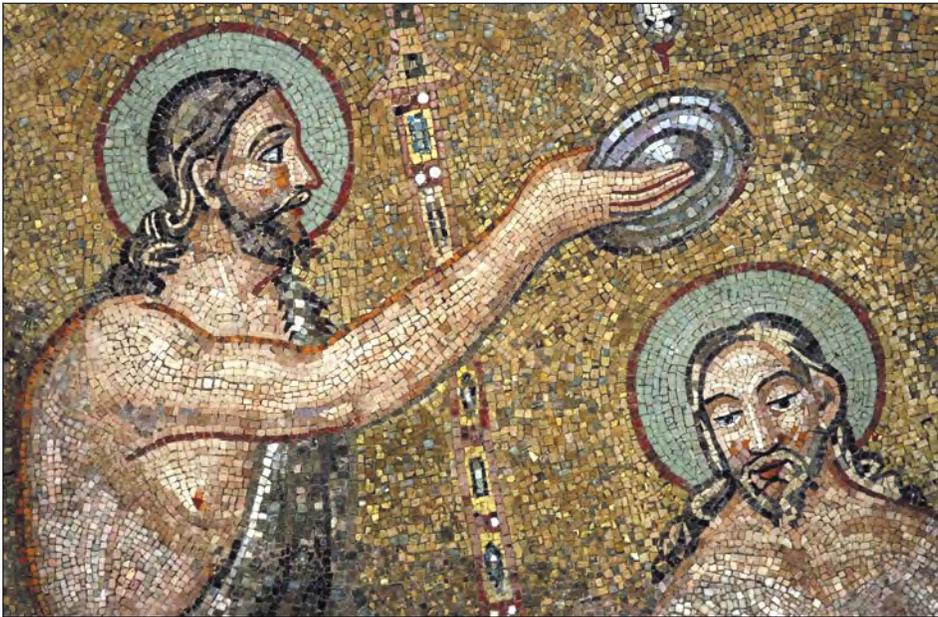
Worship of the Lord in perpetual adoration, holy hours and visits to the Blessed Sacrament are authentic forms of Catholic piety which foster solid eucharistic devotion and love for Christ's gift of the Eucharist. These acts of eucharistic devotion which flow from the Mass help foster a love for the Mass and a longing for sacramental communion with Christ.

In our busy and noisy world these moments of silent adoration provide the time and setting in which profound prayer may be born in our hearts. It is especially important to properly introduce children and young people to this spiritual treasure. Eucharistic adoration offers those discerning their vocation a privileged opportunity to hear the gentle and insistent stirring of the Lord, who speaks with "a still, small voice" (1 Kgs 19:12). Consequently, eucharistic adoration ought to be an integral component of vocation programs not only for those discerning, but also for the whole Church which must ask the Lord insistently to send laborers into the harvest (Mt 9:38).

## 9 “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

“Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ.” This admonition of Saint Jerome reminds us that an adequate training in holiness and the art of prayer, which I refer to above, calls for a renewed emphasis on listening to the word of God. In the dialogue of faith, God calls and awaits our response: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening!” (1 Sm 3:10). It is through a reverent attentiveness to the word of God, primarily when it is proclaimed in the sacred liturgy, that we are able to hear and respond to the saving word.

Since the Second Vatican Council highlighted the role of God’s word in the life of the Church, we have witnessed great progress both in devout listening and attentive study of the scriptures. The homily is now recognized as an integral part of the Mass. Individuals and communities do well to strive to know the scriptures, always within the framework of the Church’s faith and tradition. This effort is certainly enhanced by having recourse to good biblical and theological resources that enable Catholics to grasp the integral nature of the Old and New Testament through the lens of our faith in Christ. The work of evangelization and catechesis draws its life and energy from being deeply rooted in the word of God.



Beyond the intellectual study of the word, however, it is particularly important that listening to the word lead to a life-giving encounter with the Person of the Word, Jesus Christ. This is the aim of the ancient tradition known as *lectio divina*. This slow, deliberate, prayerful reading of the Bible allows God’s word to fill our mind, echo in our heart and move our will to respond, and

sometimes simply to rest in God’s loving embrace. Pope Benedict described *lectio divina* as a spiritual reading of the Bible. “ ‘Spiritual reading’ of Sacred Scripture consists in poring over a biblical text for some time, reading it and rereading it, as it were, ‘ruminating’ as the Fathers say and squeezing from it, so to speak, all its ‘juice,’ so that it may nourish meditation and contemplation and, like water, succeed in irrigating life itself” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Angelus*, Nov. 6, 2005).

## 10 “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

It has been my particular concern in this pastoral letter to teach about the extraordinary dignity of the Christian life expressed in the universal call to holiness. We are invited to “put out into the deep,” to leave behind a superficial faith and religiosity and discover the profound meaning and destiny of our lives. We are called to be saints!

The journey begins with the proclamation of the Gospel and call to conversion: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). “Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life” (CCC 1427).

The Lord’s call to conversion continues to echo in the lives of Christians, even after Baptism, for we continue to sin. Though cleansed and renewed by the saving waters, we bear the wounds and disorder of sin deep within us. The ongoing work of conversion, therefore, continues as a task for the whole Church who, “clasping sinners to her bosom, (is) at once holy and always in need of purification, (and) follows constantly the path of penance and renewal” (LG 8).

Repentance is not primarily a matter of “sackcloth and ashes.” Without an inner conversion of the

heart, exterior forms of penance remain sterile. “Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed” (CCC 1431). True repentance enables us to see sin through God’s eyes, and thus experience profound sorrow and contrition.



The interior penance to which we are called finds outward expression in many ways, but especially in the three traditional forms recommended by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount: prayer, fasting and almsgiving (Mt 6:1-18). These express and authenticate our interior conversion in relation to God, oneself and others.

Our ongoing conversion is sustained by the Eucharist, through which Christ's sacrifice is made present and by which we are nourished with the Bread of Life. Prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, reading the Sacred Scriptures, and other means discussed previously are all of great value in the work of our conversion from sin and sanctification in Christ.

## 11 "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven." (Jn 20:23)

Christ has entrusted to his Church all of the means necessary to assist us along the way of repentance and holiness. "In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift" (LG 40). One sadly neglected gift in our time, however, has been the Sacrament of Penance. Far too many members of the Church approach this sacrament rarely, if ever. Without a renewed esteem for this gift and a return to its regular and frequent celebration, the faithful remain severely hampered in their ability to realize their fundamental vocation through the call to holiness.

The Sacrament of Penance is the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and remission of serious sins committed after Baptism. It heals and strengthens us, reconciling us to God and to his Church. It is through this sacrament of mercy that we encounter the mystery of God's unconditional love which Jesus presents in the

parable of the prodigal son. It is this merciful face of Christ, who reveals the Father's love for us, which we must rediscover through the Sacrament of Penance.

Today I call upon my brother priests and our catechists to commit ourselves to developing new pastoral strategies and an effective catechesis to renew our understanding and esteem for this sacrament. We need to find practical ways of encouraging its celebration and assure its ready availability in each of our parishes. We are stewards of the mysteries of God. As good stewards, let us exercise creativity and generosity in promoting this sacrament in an effective and compelling manner.

Youth are already leading the way. The responses of many young people in our diocese and around the nation reveal an eagerness to celebrate the grace and peace that comes through this sacramental encounter with Christ, the Healer. They await only encouragement and the opportunity.

## 12 "The love of Christ urges us on!"

We must be clear that the call to holiness is not a license to indulge in a privatized and individualistic spirituality. On the contrary, it is a radical call to communion. Living our faith from the heart of the Church, sharing in the very life and love of the Holy Trinity, moves us to serve the needs of others, as Christ served. "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). To be holy is to live in union with Christ, to know him, to love him and to imitate him in his concern for all. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council is insistent on this point: "The Christian message does not inhibit men and women from building up the world, or make them dis-

interested in the welfare of their fellow human beings; on the contrary it obliges them more fully to do these very things" (GS, 34).

Holiness and communion lead necessarily to mission. We cannot separate the call to holiness and communion from the universal call to mission, that is, to the work of evangelization. "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners to God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious Resurrection" (Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, 14). The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and the One in whom all people find salvation. "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19). There are still people who have not yet heard the Good News. Our support and prayer for this mission "to all nations" (*ad gentes*) must continue. We are all called to share in this mission.

The work of evangelization which is particularly urgent in our time and place, however, is what Pope John Paul II referred to as the new evangelization. Many people today are nominally Christian, or nominally Catholic. They claim to believe but act as if God does not exist. They compartmentalize their faith, as if it pertained only to Sundays or certain religious exercises. Their faith has little or nothing to do with the way they live their lives each day. Though they have not formally rejected Christ or his Gospel, the lives of many Catholics are being shaped far more by the conventional values of the secular culture than by the liberating truth of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. Rather than evangelizing the culture, that is, shaping the culture according to the truth, beauty and goodness of the Gospel, many Christians are being 'evangelized' by the anti-gospel values which the culture espouses.

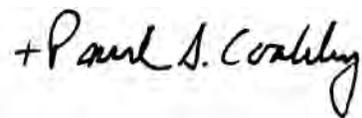
The faith of believers in our post-Christian culture needs to be re-awakened. This is our challenge! "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:15). The Church is in

the world to bear witness to Christ. "Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:16). Many Catholics shy away from their responsibility to become evangelizers. Perhaps they misunderstand their role. While each and every member of the Church has a proper part in the evangelizing mission of the Church, some as pastors, parents, or catechists, all are called to be witnesses to Christ. "Preach the Gospel always, use words when necessary." This saying, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, reminds us that the witness of a holy and virtuous life is the most effective and compelling evangelizing influence. This is the lesson that the saints teach us! Holy men and women will bring the world to Christ and renew his Church.

The challenge of the new evangelization urges us to find new and effective ways of bearing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not a new Gospel which we present, of course, but new methods and modes of presenting the Gospel which will be compelling to people in the twenty-first century. This is our task. This is our mission. This is why we have adopted the pastoral plan, "Stewards of Hope." This is also why we begin with an emphasis on the universal call to holiness. We cannot give what we do not have. The evangelizers must themselves be fully evangelized. Our witness and efforts in the work of the new evangelization will be fruitful to the extent that we are aflame with the love of Christ. "The love of Christ urges us on!" (2 Cor 5:14).

I am confident that our implementation of "Stewards of Hope" will bring forth an abundant harvest in holiness, communion and mission if we generously open our hearts to the Lord's call to holiness and courageously "put out into the deep." So may it be.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley  
Bishop of Salina

