

- Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you know Jesus Christ?
 - It may seem an odd thing to ask in a Church, but it's a question that bears repeating. Do you know Jesus Christ?
 - I have shared with you before that in all of the romance languages, there are two words for what we translate to know.
 - For example, in Italian there is the word, “*sapere*,” which means to KNOW a **FACT**. In other words I know, *sapere*, that it snowed yesterday (today).
 - In Italian, though, there is also the word “*conoscere*”, again translated in English by “to know” but also “to meet.”
 - This “to know” in Italian is reserved to **knowing** a person. I can only use *conoscere* when I am talking about knowing someone, not a **FACT** but a **PERSON** and the same word can also be translated as “to meet,” or to “encounter” because these are things you do with a person.
 - I know, *conoscere*, my sister who I talked to yesterday on the phone. I know, *conoscere*, my friend, Father Keith, who I *conoscere*'d, met, encountered, yesterday.
 - We may understand intellectually but often forget that we don't facts and people the same way.
 - We are called to know Jesus Christ, not as an historical fact but as a living Person, to know Him, *conoscere*, to meet Him, to encounter Him.

- Pope Francis makes clear in the very first paragraph of his Apostolic Exhortation that every Christian is called to the joy and the responsibility of a personal **encounter** with Jesus Christ, in other words to KNOW Jesus Christ, *conoscere*, to meet him, to encounter him, not merely to know about Him or to know of Him or to hear about Him through others.

- Do you know Jesus Christ?
 - Every Christian must ask this question because the right answer gives us the reason to **rejoice** today as we celebrate Gaudete Sunday and **EVERY DAY**, even and especially when we suffer, when the going gets tough.
 - Our Joy is knowing the God who prophesied glad tidings through Isaiah in our first reading: *glad tidings for the poor, healing for the brokenhearted, liberty for the captives and release for the prisoners, ... favor from the LORD and vindication by our God.*

- How can we be sure? **CAN** we even be sure of God's presence? The world seems dark, the truth expendable, the night long and the coldness biting. But this is not unique to our time.
 - John the Baptist had the same questions. Oh, not in today's gospel, early on in his ministry, when he is young and sure of the message he has received when he was secluded in prayer in the desert, that the Messiah would come, that he would be powerful beyond measure, that he would destroy injustice and right all the wrongs for the people Israel.

- But then, as time goes on, as Jesus appears, John the Baptist will have to admit twice that he almost missed Jesus as the Messiah. Why? Because Jesus came not as the great warrior King John expected, but as the humble preacher, sharing God's love in a far more radical but ultimately enduring way.
- And, when John is imprisoned for speaking the truth, certain of losing his life, the world dark, and the truth seems quashed by force, when John is second guessing himself, worried that his efforts, maybe even his life, have all been in vain, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus: “*Are you the ONE*”
- Jesus calms John's fear and confirm John's message, not with words but with the joy of the Gospel, with possibility of healing and hope, **promised** by Isaiah, but fulfilled in Jesus Himself **present then and there**.

- **THIS** is the reason for our joy. Jesus Christ comes to **US** right here, right now, bringing us the same calm and joy as He brought to John.
- Think about that for a moment Jesus comes to us, the omniscient, omnipotent God comes to be with us.
 - As with every encounter of Jesus in the Gospel, so, too, with us: Jesus looks to insert Himself into our lives:
 - coming to me, sinner that I am, to tell me I am loved and saved, as He did with the woman at the well;
 - healing me as He did for the blind, the deaf, the lame;

- pouring mercy on me as Prodigal Son and gentleness on me as the hard-hearted older brother;
 - consoling me as He did with Martha and Mary, even when he seemed absent, using my grief to draw me close to God;
 - breathing on me the same Spirit as on His Apostles in the upper room after His Resurrection.
- These are not mere figures of speech, nor mere reminders of what God has done in the past. No.
 - God is present to us in a way no less profound than He was when Jesus walked on the earth, not be as visible, perhaps, but no less present.
 - In other words, the Jesus that we seek to know *conoscere*, encounter now is the same One we read about in the Gospels, the One who is always reaching out, seeking to encounter, to *conoscere* any and all who are struggling. No less true now, even if He comes to us in different ways.
 - As we are assured by the Letter to the Hebrews, that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*. Jesus comes to search out the lost, the poor, the struggling, the lonely, the despairing, the overwhelmed, the sinner.
 - It's what Saint Paul reminds us in our second reading from the letter to the Thessalonians, "*Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks...*"
 - What? Is he crazy? Rejoice? Always? In this mess? When I'm overwhelmed and struggling? When the world is so dark?

- Without the next phrase, Saint Paul would be crazy but he quickly adds “*Pray without ceasing...*”
- We cannot rejoice always, we cannot possibly give thanks if we do not know *conoscere* Jesus Christ.
- How beautifully Pope Francis wrote about prayer creating a space in my life and in my heart, a space that will allow my focus and attention to shift from me to **God**, from my needs and wants to the great and gentle love God has for me.
- Prayer is the way we come to *conoscere* Jesus Christ, to know the God who comes to us, who seeks to be with us, who seeks to provide us with the same joy and consolation He gave to John the Baptist.
- God wants to share with us the gentle power of His love, not as magic that fixes all of our problems but as an awareness that we do not bear those burdens alone, that God is with us, that God walks with us, lighting our darkness, helping us to be a light in darkness for others.
- It is difficult thing to allow God to shift my focus **from me** and **onto Him**, to trust in God and God’s ways rather than grasping at control.
- I am reminded of Sister Helena O’Donnell, SSJ, who taught me in the fifth grade how to write a thesis putting up front the all information so the reader needs: who, what, when, where, how and why.
- So I offer that to you so that you have all the necessary information:

- Who? Jesus Christ and me.
What? The joy of the Gospel.
Where? Right here, and every place I find myself.
When? Right now, and every minute of every day.
How? Knowing, *conoscere*, loving, and serving Him, letting God take control and guide me even when it is dark .
Why? Because God loves me and comes to me and I can share God with others.

- And it is this “WHY” that we have been focusing in Advent,
 - on being contagious with the love of Jesus, the Jesus we have come to *conoscere*,
 - on sharing the love that Jesus showed in the Gospels and still shows to us,
 - on naming and praying for those who need that message of comfort and consolation, who think that God is far from them, who see no reason to rejoice on listing their names in our narthex and on the board at St. Mary.
 - on sharing our stories as invitation to this community and to the heart to Jesus Christ
 - and now in rejoicing, even rejoicing always because we know how close (and how powerful!) God is

- Do you know Jesus Christ?