

TO GROW IN KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST

To my brother bishops and priests, my first collaborators in the priestly ministry; to my brother deacons, co-workers in the ministry of service; to my brothers and sisters in consecrated life, living testimony of faithful commitment and apostolic life; to all the faithful, called to holiness and mission in ordinary life:

[1] On the first anniversary of my installation as the Archbishop of San Antonio, I give thanks to God for His blessings upon each one of us and especially for the grace of your faithfulness to the Gospel in your daily life that I have witnessed since my arrival.

[2] I also give thanks to God for the privilege of listening to you, both in witnessing your love of God and others and in our conversations and dialogue, as I have traveled throughout the Archdiocese.

[3] I am writing this pastoral letter to you to mark my first anniversary as your archbishop with my heart filled with gratitude to all of you for your loving welcome to my ministry among you. Those words—"your archbishop"—fill me with pride and humility: pride at being called to serve this wonderful archdiocese and humility in the knowledge of my limitations.

[4] Now, I humbly share with all of you my personal prayer, my reflection over the joys, sorrows and struggles of all of us and especially, my hope and plans for the future of our Archdiocese.

[5] Brothers and sisters, we want to learn more about people and things we love. How strange it would be if a young man told his fiancée, "I know everything about you I want to know" or a scholar said of her field of study, "I've learned as much as I wish" or a music lover declared, "I've heard all the symphonies I care to hear." Is that how people in love talk?

[6] It is the same with followers of Jesus Christ. In his new encyclical *God Is Love*, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI calls Jesus' dying for us on the cross "love in its most radical form."¹ If we truly love Our Lord in return, we will want to know him better every passing day. Not wanting that would make our love seem doubtful at best.

[7] Think of the rich young man in the gospel. He told Jesus that he kept the law and the commandments, and then asked what else he should do. Loving him for that, Jesus told him to sell what he possessed, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow him. But the young man "went away sorrowful" at hearing that. He had "great possessions," and he cared more for them than he did for Christ. (Mark: 10.17-22)

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 12.

[8] Like that rich young man, we also are tempted to put other things first in our lives, things that matter more to us than the Lord does. It is the worst mistake anyone could make.

Our Formation in the Faith

[9] I want to speak to you about our formation in the faith as the basis for our life in Christ. I say *our* formation because, just like you, I also need to grow constantly in knowledge and love of Our Lord. Formation in the faith is about getting to know Jesus better—establishing and deepening a personal relationship with him in order to be his follower and his friend. It seeks to foster a wisdom of the intellect and a wisdom of the heart.

[10] The Church in San Antonio has been engaged in formation and education in the faith since the days of the missionaries. Our venerable San Fernando Cathedral, which next month marks 275 years since its founding, is a monument to generations of faith. My predecessors spent themselves to sustain the faith of their people. Many dedicated priests, religious, and laity do the same today.

[11] I pledge to continue this work of education and formation, including formation in the social teaching of the Church, which was very close to the hearts of Archbishops Lucey, Furey, and Flores. An essential part of this body of social doctrine is the dignity and sanctity of human life and the obligation to reverence and defend every human life from conception to natural death.

[12] Parents are the first educators of their children, and the home is the first school of education and formation in the faith. I am grateful to dedicated parents who raise their sons and daughters to be faith-filled Catholics. I promise them my support.

[13] In his great encyclical letter *The Splendor of Truth*, Pope John Paul II called faith “a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a truth to be lived out.”² Following the Lord in faith, he said, means “holding fast to the very person of Jesus.”³

Teaching That Is True

[14] To grow in knowledge and love of Jesus is to grow in knowledge of his teaching and way of life. We must seek and live out the truth of Christ, both the truth of doctrine and moral truth. We must put his teaching into practice in the way we live. “Jesus’ way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life,” Pope John Paul declared.⁴

[15] Jesus' teaching is true. What Catholics believe is not a matter of opinion or personal taste. It has nothing to do with the corrosive “dictatorship of relativism” of which Pope Benedict XVI spoke on the eve of his election as pope. That error, he said, “does not recognize anything as definitive” and has as its final goal only “one's own ego and desires,” whereas we have “a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism. Mature adult

² *Veritatis Splendor*, 88.

³ *Veritatis Splendor*, 19.

⁴ *Veritatis Splendor*, 20.

faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ.”⁵ Here is, among other things, our best foundation for ecumenism and interfaith dialogue.

[16] This raises an obvious question: Where do we find Jesus and his teaching? We do not see him or hear him. He is not a TV personality or an editorial writer. But far from abandoning us, he tells us, “I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

[17] We encounter Jesus really present in the Eucharist. We encounter him in the other sacraments as well, especially the sacrament of Reconciliation. We speak with him in our private prayer, and he teaches us in the Word of God—Scripture and Tradition, transmitted and taught by his Church. As the Second Vatican Council points out, “the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church” present in the pope and the bishops in union with him.⁶

[18] Other important means of education and formation in the faith include homilies, Catholic schools and religious education programs, adult education, authentic Catholic media, and religious art—paintings, sculpture, music, and architecture. Pope Benedict once said, “The arrow of the beautiful can guide the mind to truth”—that fully satisfying truth which *is* Jesus Christ.⁷ Reading and studying the Bible are essential, and Bible study groups and programs can be helpful in doing that.

Hearing God's Call

[19] Formation and education in the faith should focus especially on getting to know and to accept the particular role God has in mind for each one of us in following Christ and continuing his redemptive work. This process of learning what God calls us to be and to do is called vocational discernment. “The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful,” Pope John Paul said, “is an ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever greater willingness to live it.”⁸

[20] Formation for vocational discernment has a central place in ministry with young people and is essential to nurturing new vocations to the priesthood and religious life. For all Catholics it is a pathway leading to intelligent, informed participation in the mission of the Church.

[21] At its deepest level, the formation in faith which empowers us to live lives modeled on the life of Christ is not accomplished by anything we do, but by the grace of God working in us. At the same time, however, we also must do our part, by seeking his grace, disposing ourselves to receive it, and cooperating with it when God responds, as he surely will do.

[22] The time has come to update and review our Formation programs and plans. This includes the wide variety of programs in the archdiocese, from the Seminary formation, to the guidelines and directives of the Department of Educational/Formational Services, which includes

⁵ *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, April 20, 2005.

⁶ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, 10.

⁷ *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, November 6, 2002.

⁸ The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, *Christifideles Laici*, 58.

our Parishes, Catholic Schools, Youth Ministry, etc., to the many evangelization initiatives that enrich the life of the Archdiocese, to the charitable activities that Pope Benedict XVI calls the practice of love.

[23] The time has come to renew our commitment to God and His people, rediscovering the joys and hopes of the true teachings of the Second Vatican Council, with a new enthusiasm based on the certainty of God's love for us and our generous response to His love, especially shown in our love for others.

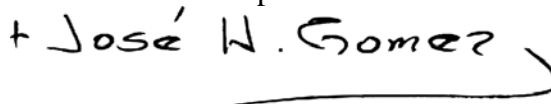
[24] We need to bear in mind something Pope Benedict told participants in last summer's World Youth Day events in Cologne. "The happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy, has a name and a face: It is Jesus of Nazareth"— Jesus whom we learn to know, to love, and to follow through education and formation in the faith.⁹

[25] I close this pastoral letter with the beautiful prayer to the Blessed Mother with which Pope Benedict XVI closed his first encyclical:

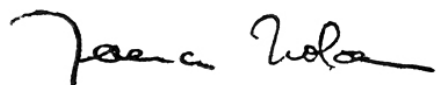
Holy Mary, Mother of God . . . ,
Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.
Teach us to know and love him,
so that we too can become
capable of true love
and be fountains of living water
in the midst of a thirsting world.¹⁰

Offering my daily prayers for each one of you and your families and asking for the charity of your prayers for me and my ministry- may the Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of God and our mother, grant you peace and joy.

Given at the Pastoral Center
of the Archdiocese of San Antonio
February 15, 2006
First anniversary of installation
as Archbishop of San Antonio



Most Reverend José H. Gomez, S.T.D.
Archbishop of San Antonio



Monsignor Terence Nolan
Chancellor

⁹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly English language edition, August 24, 2005.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 42.