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Know Christ, Seek the Will of the Father, Walk in the Spirit

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Recently I attended a Good Leaders Good Shepherds conference for bishops offered through the Catholic Leadership Institute, which helped us to clarify a unifying message, or vision, for our particular dioceses as well as set three discerned priorities for our dioceses. As they shared with us, it became evident that while bishops often have a vision and priorities they sometimes fail to clarify them and communicate them to the faithful of the particular church entrusted to their pastoral care. Also, having too many priorities often waters down the priorities or has each parish community pursuing priorities that may or may not be part of the overall vision. In this column, I wish to share with you the vision and priorities I discerned for our diocese for the next 18 months.

My unifying message and vision as Bishop is ***"Know Christ, Seek the Will of the Father, Walk in the Spirit."*** As Catholics we are called into intimacy and the communion of love in the life of the Trinity. This means first coming to know Jesus Christ. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He is the one who teaches us how to live in relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit and with one another. Hence, to know Christ on an ever deeper level is the call of every Christian. Jesus taught us by his example to always "seek the will of the Father" (John 5:30). Each time we pray the Our Father, we ask that the Father's will be done. Each Christian is called to always seek the will of the Father and not his or her own will. In seeking the will of the Father we discover his eternal love for us in a particular way. To walk in the Spirit, means living the gifts and virtues of the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are to be evident in our lives (Galatians 5:22).

From this vision flow three priorities: The first is to grow in personal holiness. The second is to grow in a deeper understanding of our Catholic faith. The third is to live the faith in acts of charity. Let us look at each one.

To grow in holiness means to become more like God each day. Peter reminds the faithful of Rome of the command of God given to the people of Israel "to be holy, for I am holy" (1Peter 1: 15-16). Growth in holiness occurs through a deep prayer life and living the sacramental life of the Church. It means taking time in silent prayer, prayerfully reading the Gospels, Eucharistic adoration, or attending retreats such as Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, silent directed retreats and so forth. As one grows in intimacy with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and recognizes in one's heart the love and mercy God has for him, one grows in holiness. To grow in holiness helps us to ***"Know Christ, Seek the Will of the Father, Walk in the Spirit."***

To grow in a deeper understanding of our Catholic faith is the second priority. Our love for Christ gives us a desire to know him and the faith he gave us. In return, a greater knowledge will bring us a deeper love for Christ. There are many educational opportunities offered for each Catholic to help us grow in knowledge and understanding of our faith. In the months ahead, all of the parishes, in union with the diocesan offices, will be offering conferences and workshops on the new translation of the Roman Missal that we will begin using this Advent, with additional information being shared through homilies, bulletin inserts and other forms of communication. The primary purpose of these gatherings is to help each Catholic grow in knowledge, understanding, reverence and love for the source and summit

of our faith, the one Sacrifice of Christ offered in each Mass. Other opportunities for increasing our understanding of our Catholic faith are found in programs such as RCIA, ECHOES, EPS, That Man is You!, ENDOW, teachings on *lectio divina* (prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture), instruction in Natural Family Planning and Theology of the Body, retreats offered with our sacramental preparation programs, the numerous faith education experiences provided through our Catholic schools and religious education classes, and many other programs. I encourage every Catholic in the diocese to participate in at least one or two of these educational opportunities in order to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith.

The third priority – to live the faith in acts of charity – can be done in diverse ways, too. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy as explained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2447, offer many ways. The important thing is that all Catholics make an effort to live their faith concretely in the society and world around us through generosity of time, talent and treasure. Feeding the hungry, outreach to the immigrant and poor, praying in front of the abortion clinic, seeking a just society, volunteering to fill and place sandbags in time of flooding, visiting those in hospitals or jails, taking part in a mission trip to Peru, Central America, or one of the cities in our own country are just a few ways Catholics can live their faith. When we as Catholics live out our faith in the world, we help to build a culture of life and serve as leaven in the world (Matthew 13:33). The Second Vatican Council reminded Catholics and the Church that they are to serve “as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Guadium et Spes* 40).

In the months ahead as we move forward as the Pilgrim People of God on our journey to our true home in the new Jerusalem, let us keep before the eyes of our hearts the call, “**Know Christ, Seek the Will of the Father, Walk in the Spirit**”. May we grow in holiness, in a deeper knowledge and understanding of our faith, and live out our faith each day so that we may be a light to the world for others to see our good works and give glory to the Father (Mt 5:16)!