

***Christus Vivit*, ‘Christ is alive!’**

Last Tuesday, 2nd April, saw the publication of Pope Francis’ new Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, ‘Christ is alive!’ It is addressed: ‘To Young People and to the Entire People of God’, and is the fruit of last October’s Synod on young people, faith and vocational discernment. 2nd April was chosen as the anniversary of the death of St John Paul II, but Pope Francis actually officially signed it on 25th March, the Annunciation, on his visit to the Shrine of the Holy House at Loreto.

Of course, we’re still reflecting on his previous Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, and we’ll return to that; but today we’ll look at this new writing. Its teaching does have particular relevance to the Legion, both in view of our existing younger members and our desire to draw more; and in view of our call to bring all people to Jesus through Mary, including the young. So I do commend it to your reading. It’s of medium length, but the numbered paragraphs are bite-sized, and it’s in an accessible style.

The Pope’s opening words are filled with joy and hope: ‘Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world, and everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian are these: Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive! He is in you, he is with you and he never abandons you. However far you may wander, he is always there, the Risen One. He calls you and he waits for you to return to him and start over again. When you feel you are growing old out of sorrow, resentment or fear, doubt or failure, he will always be there to restore your strength and your hope. With great affection, I address this Apostolic Exhortation to all Christian young people. It is meant to remind you of certain convictions born of our faith, and at the same time to encourage you to grow in holiness and in commitment to your personal vocation.’ (1-3)

We can get a quick overview of the document simply by reading through the Table of Contents:

Chapter 1: What does the word of God have to say to young people? In the Old Testament
– In the New Testament

Chapter 2: Jesus, ever young. Jesus’ youth – His youth teaches us – The youth of the Church
– A Church open to renewal – A Church attentive to the signs of the times – Mary, the young woman of Nazareth – Young saints

Chapter 3: You are the “now” of God. In positive terms – Many ways of being young – Some experiences of young people – Living in a world in crisis – Desires, hurts and longings – The digital environment – Migrants as an epitome of our time – Ending every form of abuse – A way out

Chapter 4: A great message for all young people. A God who is love – Christ saves you – He is alive! – The Spirit gives life

Chapter 5: Paths of Youth. A time of dreams and decisions – A thirst for life and experience
– In friendship with Christ – Growth in maturity – Paths of fraternity – Young and committed
– Courageous missionaries

Chapter 6: Young people with roots. Don't allow yourselves to be uprooted – Your relationship with the elderly – Dreams and visions – Taking risks together

Chapter 7: Youth Ministry. A pastoral care that is synodal – Main courses of action – Suitable environments – Youth ministry in educational institutions – Areas needing to be developed – A “popular” youth ministry – Always missionaries – Accompaniment by adults

Chapter 8: Vocation. God's call to friendship – Being there for others – Love and family – Work – The vocation to special consecration

Chapter 9: Discernment. Discerning your vocation – The call of Jesus our friend – Listening and accompaniment – And to conclude... a wish

After looking at some young figures from the Old and New Testament, the Pope surveys the youth of Jesus himself, and reminds us that he gave up his life when he was still a young adult. (23)

He goes on to explain how the Church is young, because she continually draws on the eternal youth of Christ: ‘The Church is young when she is herself, when she receives ever anew the strength born of God's word, the Eucharist, and the daily presence of Christ and the power of his Spirit in our lives. The Church is young when she shows herself capable of constantly returning to her source. Certainly, as members of the Church, we should not stand apart from others... Yet at the same time we must dare to be different, to point to ideals other than those of this world, testifying to the beauty of generosity, service, purity, perseverance, forgiveness, fidelity to our personal vocation, prayer, the pursuit of justice and the common good, love for the poor, and social friendship.’ (35-36)

And then the Pope speaks of Our Lady: ‘In the heart of the Church, Mary shines forth. She is the supreme model for a youthful Church that seeks to follow Christ with enthusiasm and docility. While still very young, she accepted the message of the angel, yet she was not afraid to ask questions (cf. *Lk* 1:34). With open heart and soul, she replied, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (*Lk* 1:38).’ (43)

“‘We are always struck by the strength of the young Mary's ‘yes’, the strength in those words, ‘be it done’, that she spoke to the angel. This was no merely passive or resigned acceptance, or a faint ‘yes’, as if to say, ‘Well, let's give it a try and see what happens’. Mary did not know the words, ‘Let's see what happens’. She was determined; she knew what was at stake and she said ‘yes’ without thinking twice. Hers was the ‘yes’ of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise.’” (44)

And in his conclusion to the whole document, the Pope returns to Mary: ‘If you are to accompany others on this path, you must be the first to follow it, day in and day out. That is what Mary did, in her own youth, as she confronted her own questions and difficulties. May she renew your youthfulness by the power of her prayers and accompany you always by her maternal presence.’ (298)