

Saints *Alive!*

A Periodic Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Issue
23

Christ the Center

By Rich Cleveland

*The true Christian ...
enthrones the Son of God
in his conscience, refers
to Him as a sovereign
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reasoning with Him.
(Newman)*

Having, or making, Christ as the *center* of our life, is primarily concerned with the extent to which we understand, believe, and embrace Jesus as *Lord* of our life. Most of us as Christians are delighted to have Jesus as our Savior; we are conscious of our sin and need of redemption, forgiveness and mercy. It is indeed “good news” that Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension pays the penalty we deserve, and in addition reconciles us to the Father as heirs and joint-heirs with Jesus. However, most of us will admit that allowing Christ to rule in our lives, is another thing. Many, if honest, will simply say “I seldom think about it,” while others will confess that it seems hard and legalistic to live for Jesus amidst the busyness, and secularization we encounter. Consequently, to diminish the struggle, we often simply compartmentalize the activities and roles of our life, shutting Jesus out of those areas that are not clearly “religious,” unless, of course, we get into an emergency situation. But the reality is that having Christ as the Center of our life brings focus, meaning, and direction amidst that busyness and secularization, and greatly increases the level of joy and peace we experience as followers of Jesus.

Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman in one of his sermons really helps clarify the issue, though he doesn’t use the term “Christ the Center.” However, he does clarify the concept’s meaning by contrasting people who make Christ their center, with others who though appreciating Christ’s presence, do not wish to make him the *center* of their life. In his *Parochial and Plain Sermons* Newman explains the essence of the concept as he writes about a “true Christian” as one “who has faith in Him, as to live in the thought that He [Jesus] is present with him... , in his inner most heart, or in his *conscience*. ... He [the true Christian] alone admits Christ into the

shrine of his heart; whereas others wish in some way or other, to be by themselves, to have a home, a chamber, a tribunal, a throne, a self **where God is not**, — a home within them which is **not** a temple, a chamber which is **not** a confessional, a tribunal **without** a judge, a throne **without** a king; — **that self may be king and judge**; and that the Creator may rather be dealt with and approached as though a second party, instead of being that true and better self, of which self itself should be but an instrument and minister.”¹

Herein is the problem of making Christ the Center of our life, there cannot be two people at the center, one’s self and Jesus, there cannot be two people steering, there cannot be two commanders at the helm, nor two judges deciding the case of what is right. We must relinquish control to him so that there is not always a struggle, always a battle, about who will reign and rule in our life.

Newman points out the need to think through and decide who the King of one’s life is going to be, who is the rightful person to reign in us, and implies that this decision should be viewed as a life choice, rather than an ambiguity which our conscience must continually fight over. Newman explains, “The true Christian ... **enthrones** the Son of God in his conscience, refers to Him as a sovereign authority, and uses no reasoning with Him. He does not reason, but he says, ‘Thou, God seest me.’ He feels that God is too near him to allow of argument, self-defense, excuse, or objection. He appeals in matters of duty, not to his own reason, but to God Himself, whom with the eyes of faith he sees, and whom he makes the Judge.”² An individual does not technically enthrone Christ as King,

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1. *The Heart of Newman; A synthesis arranged by Erich Przywara, S. J.*, pages 203-204. (Emphasis added.)

2. *Ibid*

From the Heart

By Henry Abeyta

Having just celebrated the Advent and Christmas seasons, now is a good time to turn our attention to what needs to change in our lives at the start of a new year. Many turn with gusto to exercise to overcome flabbiness and lack of energy in their physical bodies. Some begin new programs to overcome bad habits and addiction that has served to anesthetize their minds. Some turn to spiritual practices to reinvigorate their faith. So, as you and I begin this new year, I invite you to take a look at yourself from a perspective beyond your own vantage point to get a view from our Creator and to listen and be guided by him.

I begin with a review of my spiritual journey and repeatedly find that it is a great starting point to reflect on the experiences of the past years, drawing lessons for the path ahead. For most of us, the beginning of a new year brings to the surface previous intentions and good practices that somehow ended earlier than desired. What will be different this year? What brings lasting change? In this issue we explore the very source of meaning in life, our relationship with Jesus our Lord, Christ at the center of our being. In future issues we will explore the dimensions of our relationship with Jesus.

Saint Augustine writing about the Christian life challenges us to assess ourselves based on how we reflect the attributes of God; “For approach to God is not by intervals of place, but by likeness, and withdrawal from Him is by unlikeness.”¹ Prompted by Saint Augustine I can ask myself, how do I reflect God’s “likeness?” Although annual goal-setting may contribute to seeing progress in time and space, having my being in God, his attributes need to be growing in my life. If on the other hand my life represents things that are unlike God, then my journey is on the wrong path and directionally leading to a place that will end far from God. Thus this measure of “likeness” is a useful tool in our self-assessment.

So how is it possible to be like Jesus, God’s gift to man, revealing his “likeness?” God, through his grace has made that possible. God, as creator has continuously through human history striven to make his presence known among the people and over and over again rescued us from our rebellion and sin. One visible symbol of God’s presence among his people was the temple and previous to the temple, the tent of meeting. God guided the people by day and night through his presence among them.

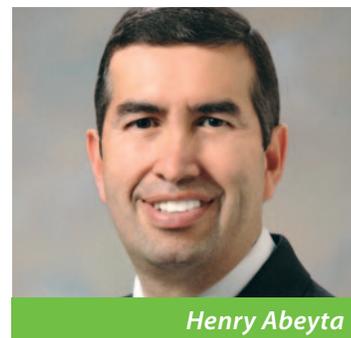
God, through grace operating in faith, has now taken another step in the person of Jesus, through his sacrifice on the cross to redeem and rescue us from the consequences of our rebellion. We are instructed by Saint Paul that God’s presence among us is now implanted in our very being: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

So then I participate in Mass with the revelation that the spirit of God is dwelling in me—dwelling, not visiting, but taking up residence—the very Spirit of God that is empowering us to be like him. I am humbled and grateful that God has given me a mission to be a very part of this on-going work, and that by striving to grow in knowing him brings ultimate meaning and purpose to my life through a reflection of his “likeness.”

So at the start of this new year, I recommit to follow his guiding presence, and am challenged to put his ongoing presence to work, by taking steps to be like him.

Henry Abeyta became Director of Emmaus Journey in January 2012. With its establishment as a tax exempt 501c(3) organization in 2014, Henry has served as its President. He and Darlene are the proud parents of two married sons and proud grandparents of four grandsons. Henry retired from Sandia National Laboratories where he worked for 30 years. He and Darlene are long-time members of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque.

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Emmaus Journey

MISSION:

Emmaus Journey is a lay Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry which partners with parishes, small groups and individuals to facilitate a personal encounter with and conversion to Christ, thereby forming missionary disciples actively living for Jesus.

VISION:

By encountering Christ through scripture, discipleship and community—individuals experience: 1) conversion to Christ; 2) transformation in Christ; and 3) mobilization for Christ, where they are actively involved in sharing their faith with others and living out their faith in the greater community. Thus achieving Goal One of the USCCB’s initiative on evangelization, “To bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that, in living their faith in Jesus, they freely share it with others.”



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1. *Delphi Collected Works of Saint Augustine*, Delphi Ancient Classics Book 68, 2016

Teachings of the Church

Excerpt from a homily given by Pope Francis' Sunday, November 24, 2013 in Rome on the Solemnity of Christ King of the Universe, marking the end of The Year of Faith

Today's solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, the crowning of the liturgical year, also marks the conclusion of the Year of Faith opened by Pope Benedict XVI, to whom our thoughts now turn with affection and gratitude for this gift which he has given us. By this providential initiative, he gave us an opportunity to rediscover the beauty of the journey of faith begun on the day of our Baptism, which made us children of God and brothers and sisters in the Church. A journey which has as its ultimate end our full encounter with God, and throughout which the Holy Spirit purifies us, lifts us up and sanctifies us, so that we may enter into the happiness for which our hearts long. ...

The Scripture readings proclaimed to us have as their common theme the centrality of Christ. Christ is at the center, Christ is the center. Christ is the center of creation, Christ is the center of his people and Christ is the center of history.

1. The apostle Paul, in the second reading, taken from the letter to the Colossians, offers us a profound vision of the centrality of Jesus. He presents Christ to us as the first-born of all creation: in him, through him and for him all things were created. He is the center of all things, he is the beginning: Jesus Christ, the Lord. God has given him the fullness, the totality, so that in him all things might be reconciled. He is the Lord of creation, he is the Lord of reconciliation.

This image enables [us] to see that Jesus is the center of creation; and, so the attitude demanded of us as true believers is that of recognizing and accepting in our lives the centrality of Jesus Christ, in our thoughts, in our words and in our works. And, so our thoughts will be Christian thoughts, thoughts of Christ. Our works will be Christian works, works of Christ; and our words will be Christian words, words of Christ. But when this center is lost, when it is replaced by something else, only harm can result for everything around us and for ourselves.

2. Besides being the center of creation and the center of reconciliation, Christ is the center of the people of God. Today, he is here in our midst. He is here right now in his word, and he will be here on the altar, alive and present amid us, his people. We see this in the first reading which describes the time when the tribes of Israel came to look for David and anointed him king of Israel before the Lord. In searching for an ideal king, the people were seeking God himself: a God who would be close to them, who would accompany them on their journey, who would be a brother to them.

Christ, the descendant of King David, is really the 'brother' around whom God's people come together. It is he who cares

for his people, for all of us, even at the price of his life. In him we are all one, one people, united with him and sharing a single journey, a single destiny. Only in him, in him as the center, do we receive our identity as a people.

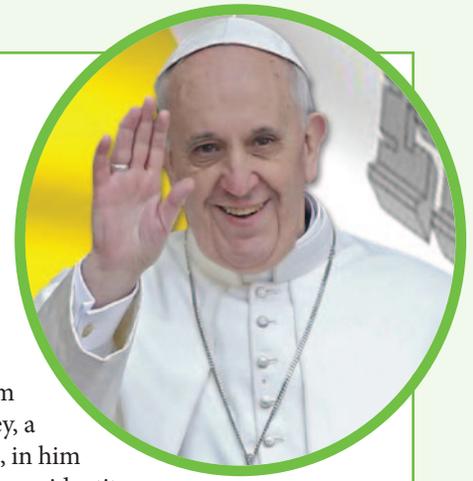
3. Finally, Christ is the center of the history of humanity and also the center of the history of every individual. To him we can bring the joys and the hopes, the sorrows and troubles which are part of our lives. When Jesus is the center, light shines even amid the darkest times of our lives; he gives us hope, as he does to the good thief in today's Gospel.

Whereas all the others treat Jesus with disdain — 'If you are the Christ, the Messiah King, save yourself by coming down from the cross!' — the thief who went astray in his life but now repents, clings to the crucified Jesus and begs him: 'Remember me, when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus promises him: 'Today you will be with me in paradise,' in his kingdom. Jesus speaks only a word of forgiveness, not of condemnation; whenever anyone finds the courage to ask for this forgiveness, the Lord does not let such a petition go unheard. Today we can all think of our own history, our own journey. Each of us has his or her own history: we think of our mistakes, our sins, our good times and our bleak times. We would do well, each one of us, on this day, to think about our own personal history, to look at Jesus and to keep telling him, sincerely and quietly: 'Remember me, Lord, now that you are in your kingdom! Jesus, remember me, because I want to be good, but I just don't have the strength: I am a sinner, I am a sinner. But remember me, Jesus! You can remember me because you are at the center, you are truly in your kingdom!' How beautiful this is! Let us all do this today, each one of us in his or her own heart, again and again. 'Remember me, Lord, you who are at the center, you who are in your kingdom.'

Jesus' promise to the good thief gives us great hope: it tells us that God's grace is always greater than the prayer which sought it. The Lord always grants more, he is so generous, he always gives more than what he has been asked: you ask him to remember you, and he brings you into his kingdom! Let us go forward together on this road!"

Let us ask the Lord to remember us, in the certainty that by his mercy we will be able to share his glory in paradise. Let us go forward together on this road!

Amen!



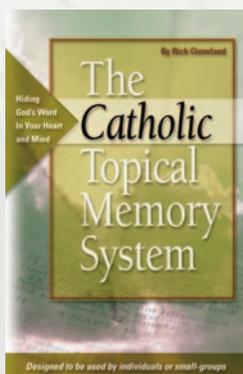
The Catholic Topical Memory System

Why Memorize and Meditate on Scripture?

The Bible is foundational to our life and health in Jesus Christ. The Psalmist says that the Scripture revives the soul, makes wise the simple, causes joy in our heart and enlightens our understanding (Psalm 19:7-10). The individual who is serious about following God will become a student of sacred Scripture, finding that as he meditates on it and aligns his life with it that the benefits will far outweigh the effort expended.

We memorize scripture to:

1. **Follow Jesus example** — “Catholics are first and foremost called to be followers of Jesus Christ.”
2. **Enhance our meditation** — “We benefit from sacred Scripture when we are able to think about it, grasp its meaning and apply it to our daily lives.”
3. **Equip us for life and ministry** — “... many times, in moments of crisis, or in opportunities for ministry, the Holy Spirit would use some memorized passage to provide guidance or assistance...”
4. **Learn our way around the bible** — “As you begin to memorize key verses you will not only gain insight into those passages but they will also provide invisible bookmarks in your memory to help you find your way around the bible.”



In response to this need, Emmaus Journey has developed *Hiding God's Word in Your Heart and Mind: The Catholic Topical Memory System*. This small- group resource enables Catholics to become strong in their knowledge of the Scripture by combining Bible study discussion on thirty-five important topics of spiritual

formation with an effective plan for Scripture memorization. Additionally, each book comes with 35 perforated verse cards and a handsome verse card holder.

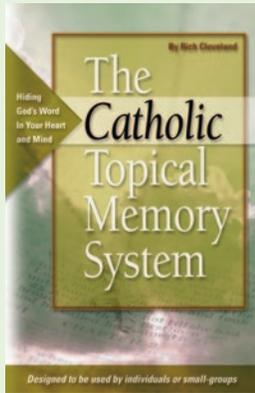


Topic: Christ the Center

Verses: 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 2:20

Reflection on the Wisdom of the Church

It can be demanding to relate to people as salt and light, and to continually give ourselves to others



through good deeds. The Christian who attempts to do so by his own strength and without the right motives usually ends up either self-righteous and proud, or discouraged and burned out. It is crucial that Christ's life and love become the power source at the center of our lives.

Saint John Eudes adequately captures the

essence and absolute necessity of Christians having Christ as the center and power source of their life...

Questions for Meditation

2 Corinthians 5:17

- What is the time frame for becoming a new creature in Christ? Is it immediate, a process or both? Explain.
- What is the motivation for living the new life as seen in vs. 14–21?
- What 'old' area is Christ removing from your life?
- What aspects of newness has Christ brought to your life?

Galatians 2:20

- What affect should being crucified with Christ have on your thoughts, emotions, or behavior?
- How does knowledge of Christ's love for you help you to live a life of faith for him?

Christ the Center *continued from front page*

or the Center of his life since the truth of it is that Jesus is King and Lord whether we acknowledge it or not. Rather, a Christian, by faith validates for himself, and begins cooperating with, the truth of Scripture and Church dogma regarding the nature of Jesus, and his Lordship over all mankind which has been given to him by the Father.

This decision to relinquish control of our life to Jesus and cooperate by giving him his rightful place in the center of our life is immensely important. To do so is not simply acknowledging a positional change, or affirming a doctrinal truth, but involves living daily in communication with Jesus, and allowing him to actually be in charge of our daily existence. It is a relational change driven by a desire to know Christ, and be known by him, to know his love and to love him in return. As is true in all human relationships there will be times when self-will and independence will exert itself, and we will fail to let Christ be Lord in our life, and sin will occur. So, a natural question in this discussion is, "How do I learn to yield more fully, and follow his lead more faithfully?" There are some basic habits which can be developed which will train us to be more responsive to Jesus leadership; habits like meditating on Scripture, developing our prayer life, and participating faithfully in the sacramental life of our parish. These ingredients involve a mixture of a Christian's personal and communal life, and must be viewed not as a list of legal requirements, but as an opportunity; a means to accomplish the end—knowing Jesus and lovingly following him in our daily life.

When Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment,

he replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." Interestingly, Jesus characterizes our lives as having four segments, heart, soul, mind, and strength. Frequently, though, we do not love God comprehensively in this way, but rather express our love for God primarily in one of these four segments to the detriment of the others. Consequently, we find some who love devotedly but are weak on understanding, or others who have great knowledge about God, but lack deep love. Still there are some who express their love very emotionally, while failing to attend to people's physical needs, and still others who go about doing all kinds of good, but who have little interest in increasing their understanding. It seems like we all want to *love God on our terms and in the way we choose*. Jesus teaches that this partial response is not sufficient. He repeatedly uses the word "all" to communicate that our love for God should grow to encompass all parts of our being; *all* our affections, *all* our emotions, *all* our understanding, and *all* our actions. This type of love is an all-consuming love, beyond our natural capabilities, and consequently requires the giving of all that we are to him. This then is the essence of enthroning Jesus in our heart as the center of our life; experiencing his love, and reflecting love back to him by entrusting ourselves to his leadership and control.

Rich Cleveland is the founder of Emmaus Journey and was its first Director. He and his wife continue to serve Emmaus Journey, and live in Colorado Springs, Colo.