



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 2019

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With Advent on the horizon, we ought to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. This Season of anticipation and longing allows all of us to welcome God's invitation to become *A Disciple of Christ*. This brings to mind the disciples in the early Church and the great sacrifice that they lived day in and day out.

The call to be *A Disciple of Christ* thus requires a response from you! It may involve speaking out, giving up certain things in your life, or even taking on extra responsibilities. But the reality is, and Pope Francis has said this well, "We cannot be tepid disciples. The Church needs our courage in order to give witness to truth."

Beginning with the Advent Season of 2019 and to celebrate the 35th Anniversary of the Diocese of Venice, the Diocese is launching a campaign for all to become *A Disciple of Christ*. The campaign will run through the Liturgical Seasons beginning with Advent, then Christmas, a portion of Ordinary Time, Lent, Easter, and concluding with Pentecost. These Seasons allow each of us to discover and experience what it means to be *A Disciple of Christ*. The Liturgical Calendar provides an emphasis on how to live during each Season with its special focus; how to personally follow Jesus and become more united to Him in the daily life of each Liturgical Season.

To be *A Disciple of Christ* does not mean only to follow Him in external practices and the traditions of the Church, but to respond to Jesus from the heart in loving obedience and trust. We remember the rich young man who approached Jesus asking what must be done to inherit eternal life. Although he had followed the commandments since his youth, Jesus extols him to make sacrifices, sell his things, give to the poor, and follow Him (Cf. Matthew 19:21). This is more than just money, Jesus is calling the young man to rid himself of distractions and attachments in order to be *A Disciple of Christ*. The young man goes away sad, but that is the last heard of him in the Gospel. To be a disciple, one must respond willfully and daily to Christ's call and follow not only His teaching, but His example as well. Don't go away sad, become *A Disciple of Christ!*

There is also an emphasis on that period of "becoming." You may think, "I am already following Christ" but the call is to intentionally choose to become *A Disciple of Christ* each and every day. Every moment provides an opportunity to be filled with Christ's love. Allow it to transform your heart and life. Then bring this love to your family, your friends, and as well to your enemies.

Opportunities to deepen your relationship with Christ, and thus to begin the journey to be a Disciple, are all around us. There are different prayer and/or study groups with which to be involved. There are areas of outreach to families, to the homeless, to the marginalized and those on the peripheries, as Pope Francis would tell us. Many Diocesan programs, conferences, and resources are also available to accompany you and enrich your journey.

It is understood that programs do not make disciples, but sometimes they are needed to help us become more, to live the Gospel. This "more" is meant to bring you deeper in your personal relationship with Christ in such a way that it becomes not merely a part of your life but frames you in all that you do.

In this Advent Season, be encouraged to take advantage of these steps, programs, and opportunities that lead you to be *A Disciple of Christ*. Take Christ into your home; take Christ into your heart! Prepare to receive Him in a new and transformative way this Season as we also look forward to His Second Coming, for in this life there is nothing of greater importance for us.

Rest assured of my prayers for you and your family and please keep me in your prayers as we continue our journey together to be evermore *A Disciple of Christ*

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank J. Dewane", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first name.

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
Vero Beach in Florida

FJD/mm