



Throughout this year, the evangelist Luke has been teaching us how to live our life in Christ with hope. It is the hope found in the stories of those who are lost and abandoned, whom Christ has searched out and brought home to safety. It is the story of the prodigal son, the man left for dead rescued by the Good Samaritan, the beggar Lazarus and today the Good Thief. As Pope Francis has reminded us in the Jubilee of Mercy, these are our stories and when we remember that, not only do we open ourselves in humility to the mercy of God, but we also allow God to create space in our lives to treat with compassion and mercy the poor, the abandoned, the forgotten and the marginalized – all people who are just like us, lost. The message is clear. The hope we receive in being found by the Lord, we are to give to others by searching them out and bringing them home to safety. That in a nutshell is our mission, the mission of the Church.

On this weekend Cardinal Cupich becomes a member of the College of Cardinals; he is asking us all to take up that mission as disciples with fresh vigor and enthusiasm, not just for a year but in a way that transforms all of our parish communities for generations to come. He is calling this effort *Renew My Church*, and he has asked all parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago to tell you more about it this weekend. That title, *Renew My Church*, is inspired by the encounter St. Francis had with Jesus as he prayed before the famous San Damiano Cross. It is at that moment that St. Francis heard Jesus say to him: “Rebuild My Church.”

There are three things Cardinal Cupich has asked us to notice about the San Damiano Cross as a means of helping us keep our focus as we move forward with *Renew My Church*.

We notice first in the San Damiano Cross that unlike most crucifixes, Jesus in this scene, while near death, is still alive and speaking. It is a reminder that taking up the mission in every age is Christ’s work, not ours, and discipleship will therefore always involve a dying, a leaving behind old patterns and pathways that have made us comfortable and even complacent. There will be dying in this process of *Renew My Church*, particularly as we move beyond a view of Church that is defined only by my parish, or my needs, to one that includes the good of the entire Church of Chicagoland. This should not leave us afraid, for the one calling us to become more intentional as disciples and to take up this work is Christ himself, the one who conquered death.

Secondly, in the scene of the San Damiano Cross, Jesus has united around himself not only Mary and his beloved disciple, but people of all backgrounds and people from the time of St. Francis. It is a reminder that one outcome that will help us measure the success of *Renew My Church* is how it leaves us more united as a Church – united across racial, political, ethnic and social lines. Similarly, it is a challenge to make sure that no one feels left behind but all are included.

Finally, in the San Damiano Cross, we see that above the dying Christ is a scene of the Resurrection. This is the promise held out to us, which will encourage us and prompt a spirit of sacrifice that will be needed for working together. Yes, there is a cost for discipleship. Yes, there will be dying, but death will not have the last word. All of this puts into perspective how *Renew My Church* has the potential of having an historic and transformative impact on each of our lives and the entire Church – the kind of transformation that the Resurrection of Jesus brought to the entire world. Much like the Good Thief pleading to the dying Christ for new life, we too are invited to trust that he is at our side and on our side. Just like the Good Thief who seemed to be destined to be with Christ at that particular moment, we too are living in a graced moment in history, invited to take up the mission of Christ with greater vigor as intentional disciples who can make a difference for the future.





Part of that graced moment is the leadership of Pope Francis, whose words and works are inspiring us to take responsibility for our Church. This is how he put it last year during his homily in Philadelphia:

One of the great challenges facing the Church in this generation is to foster in the faithful a sense of personal responsibility for the Church's mission, and to enable them to fulfill that responsibility as missionary disciples, as a leaven of the Gospel in our world. This will require creativity in adapting to changed situations, carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions, which have served us well, but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of our life.

Like his namesake, St. Francis, the Holy Father is listening to Christ and his call to renew the Church today. He is asking us to do the same. He is inviting us to take up this work, undaunted by the challenges, even those that will require our dying, but ever hopeful that by staying together unity in our common discipleship, we will be a stronger, more vibrant and life-giving Church, one that we as adults will be proud to hand on to our children and future generations. This is our mission. This is why we have been baptized. This is the mission of the Church.