

How We Can Live Out the Vision of John Paul II  
by Bishop Ricken

Pope John Paul II is the moral conscience not just of the Church, but of the world. He has written more than all the popes in history combined, including issuing the new Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Some experts say it will take 50 years to unpack the meaning of everything this Pope has said, done and written. However long it takes, one thing is certain, John Paul has given us a road map for the New Millennium. Through his writing and teaching and traveling and witnessing, he has laid the groundwork for what he calls a "Springtime of Christianity";

However, it would be unfair to credit John Paul alone for this road map into the New Millennium. One can't speak of the vision of John Paul II without at the same time mentioning the vision of Vatican Council II and his predecessors, Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. It would be fair to say, on the other hand, that, while Pope John XXIII started it and Paul the VI oversaw the conclusion and early implementation of the Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II drove it, playing a pivotal role in shaping many of the conciliar documents that would serve as the blueprint for a renewed and revitalized Church under his leadership, a Church better able to meet the complex needs of our time.

John Paul understood and shared the vision of the Council from its beginning. He has also governed the Church during two-thirds of the post-Conciliar period, longer than his three predecessors combined. He considers the Council;as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the 20th century, where we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.

The vision of Vatican II is John Paul's vision and his best hope. As he said in *Novo Millennio Inuente*;

From the beginning of my Pontificate, my thoughts had been on this Holy Year 2000 as an important appointment. I thought of its celebration as a providential opportunity during which the Church, 35 years after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, would examine how far she had renewed herself, in order to be able to take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm.

Building upon the work of his three predecessors, John Paul has tirelessly steered the Church into the New Millennium, encouraging her to do what Christ has always called His apostles to do "beginning with Peter and his first companions; namely, *Duc in altum*, which means, "Put out into the deep" for a catch. And John Paul promises that, like the first apostles, if we put our trust in Christ regardless of fatigue and past failures, we, too, will catch a great number of fish for Jesus!

Now if we look around, we might become discouraged and wonder how we here in Wyoming can make this great catch. Perhaps we fear our ability to be protagonists in a society that has largely succumbed to evil and that has lost hope. A lack of justice (abortion), peace (Iraq), and compassion (violence) seems to abound. In our own community, we have seen increased instances of domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, high teen pregnancy rates and divorce rates, not to mention a high incidence

of suicide tragically growing among our youth. Indeed, the “culture of death” threatens to overwhelm us even here in Wyoming!

Go and make disciples

Regardless, Pope John Paul reminds us that Christ’s call to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”(Mt 28:19) is the same today for us as it was for the early Christians. And like the first Christians, not only are we to “go” but we are to “go” enthusiastically, counting on “the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost and who impels us still today to start out anew, sustained by the hope” which does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5). In the face of this missionary mandate, John Paul exclaims, “Be not afraid!”

A new century, a new millennium are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its reflection.

Wonderful and demanding. Wonderful because there is no greater joy than to live with Jesus at the center, and to work for his Kingdom in the world. There is no drama so great or exciting as the Christian drama as we seek His face, day in and day out, in the people and circumstances of our lives. Wonderful, yes. And yet, the task of reflecting Christ is demanding, because the battle to open ourselves and others to Him, our true life, is difficult, requiring relentless effort and constant vigilance!

Pope John Paul challenges us to offer man a reason for hope, finding new ways of reaching modern man with the Good News &#8211; ways that he can hear, understand, and then follow, in order to find Him, who is the reason for everything! Our Pope calls for us to think outside the box in creating new structures for communicating the message and to exercise “even greater resourcefulness” in our expressions of charity towards others, expressions that respect their dignity as persons. As the Pope says:“Now is the time for a new,creativity”; in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by “getting close” to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters.

As the Millennium begins, John Paul II reissues his call for apostles of the New Evangelization who will find effective means of winning others to Christ. He invites Bishops, in union with the laity and the entire to Church, to put into practice,resolutions and guidelines for action. Because, as John Paul II says:

“It is in the local churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified” goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources &#8211; which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.

Discover Christ through prayer

But, John Paul admonishes, any true diocesan plan can be effective only if founded upon an authentic love and knowledge of Christ. Therefore, the experience of silence and prayer must precede our planning. The Pope has made clear that a necessary ingredient to the success of our diocesan program here in Wyoming is the holiness of our people, a holiness which can only be the fruit of prayer. For it is in prayer that we discover and contemplate the face of Jesus, the contemplation of which is the very essence of holiness.

The Holy Father points out that, only if we are holy, will our pastoral plan here in Wyoming be dynamic, because holiness won't let us "settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity."

Therefore, our Church in Wyoming should become genuine "schools" of prayer, where our meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love".

I assume that all of you here attend Sunday Mass. Many of you are daily communicants, drawing from the Eucharist the strength and inspiration to give your life for Christ daily. Some of you participate in the Divine Office as well. Throughout the state, we have Eucharistic Adoration, where special graces await those who seek Him there. All these are the genuine schools of prayer of which the Holy Father speaks and where you will find and contemplate the face of Jesus.

Not only by these means will you find Him, according to John Paul II, but also by means of what he calls your "spirituality of communion"; a spirituality which springs forth from charity, the hallmark of a truly Christian life. The Pope refers here to a spirituality that contemplates the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us.

This is a spirituality that gives us the ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith as those who are a part of me, and a gift for me to offer them deep and genuine friendship, to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God. And, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, "bearing each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy

Unless charity prevails, including charity towards one another within Wyoming, John Paul warns that our external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. In his words, They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth. From the beginning, charity has been the sign of the Church. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

And so I encourage you, to continue your growth in the many "schools of prayer"; which are already a part of your long history. Likewise, I encourage you to continue your

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growth in charity, so that you will become a guiding light of holiness to each other and to all of Wyoming and beyond. In this way, you will realize the vision of Pope John Paul II and this Diocese for the New Millennium.

### Mary and Pope John Paul II

I really cannot conclude without referring to the Blessed Virgin, to whom the Pope has dedicated his life and entire pontificate. Totus Tuus! I am all thine, and all that I have is thine! In a special way, John Paul II is Mary's Pope.

October marked the end of the year of the Rosary proclaimed by Pope John Paul last October in his Apostolic Letter Rosarium Virginis Mariae. He asked us to pray for peace and for families. In particular, he recommended a new approach to praying the Rosary which will ensure that it is seen and experienced as a path of contemplation.

In the words of John Paul, "To recite the Rosary is nothing other than to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ." Praying the Rosary is like sitting at the feet of Mary, learning from her about her Son. And who better than a mother can teach us about a son?

Because the rosary is the contemplation of the face of Christ through the eyes of Mary, it is a tremendous tool for holiness and should be prayed often privately and publicly, in our families and churches.

For those of you who do not pray the rosary regularly, the Pope invites you, whatever your state of life, from the elderly and infirm to the young, to "confidently take up the Rosary once again." John Paul prayed that this appeal would not go unheard; let it be heard here in Wyoming!