

# Pope addresses self-knowledge in exhortation



Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Christus Vivit* ("Christ is Alive"), written in the form of a letter to young people, addresses the many elements you would expect – namely what it means to be a young person in the Catholic

Church today.

Yet, the subtle theme I most appreciated in his letter was the emphasis on self-knowledge. In his chapters on vocation and discernment, especially, the Holy Father encourages young people to grow in self-knowledge in order to better discern and live out their vocations and the special mission God has placed on their hearts. To illustrate this point, he writes:

– “To respond to our vocation, we need to foster and develop all that we are. This has nothing to do with inventing ourselves or creating ourselves out of nothing. It has to do with finding our true selves in the light of God and letting our lives flourish and bear fruit” (No. 257).

– “We need to ask: Do I know myself, quite apart from my illusions and emotions? Do I know what brings joy or sorrow to my heart? What are my strengths and weaknesses? These questions immediately give rise to others: How can I serve people better and prove most helpful to our world and to the Church? What is my real place in this world? What can I offer to society? Even more realistic questions then follow: Do I have the abilities needed to offer this kind of service? Could I develop those abilities?” (No. 285).

We are unique, and as Pope Francis explains earlier in the document (No. 122), we were bought with the precious blood of Christ. If we do not understand that our identity should be

found primarily in God – “Every young person who feels called to a mission in this world is invited to hear the Father speaking those same words within his or her heart: ‘You are my beloved child’” (No. 25) – and that we are uniquely made to bring about his glory through our lives, we will often fall short and feel unfulfilled.

This self-knowledge affects every other aspect of life addressed in the letter: effective youth ministry, community, the influences of technology – even finding hope from the saints who have gone before us. If, as young adults and followers of Christ, we know ourselves and try to grow close to Christ, God will guide us to best use our talents and bring goodness to those around us. This will further embolden the Church by raising up a stronger generation of faithful, vibrant Catholics.

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