

# CHAPTER TWO

CHRISTUS VIVIT- JESUS, EVER YOUNG



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Chapter two of **Christ is alive** begins with an invitation to the young people of the church to explore the theme of Jesus' adolescent years where he grew in "wisdom, age and grace". We should not think, Pope Francis writes, that *"Jesus was a withdrawn adolescent or a self-absorbed youth. His relationships were those of a young person who shared fully in the life of his family and his people", "no one regarded him as unusual or set apart from others"* (28). The Pope points out that, *"thanks to the trust of his parents", the adolescent Jesus, "can move freely and learn to journey with others"* (29). These aspects of Jesus' life should not be ignored in youth ministry, *"lest we create projects that isolate young people from their family and the larger community, or turn them into a select few, protected from all contamination". Rather, we need "projects that can strengthen them, accompany them and impel them to encounter others, to engage in generous service, in mission"* (30).

Speaking directly to the youth of the church, Pope Francis continues: Jesus *"does not teach you, young people, from afar or from without, but from within your very youth, a youth he shares with you"* and in him many aspects typical of young hearts can be recognized (31). With *"him at our side, we can drink from the true wellspring that keeps alive all our dreams, our projects, our great ideals, while impelling us to proclaim what makes life truly worthwhile"* (32); *"The Lord is calling us to enkindle stars in the night of other young people"* (33).

Pope Francis then invites young people to a prayer and a challenge: *"Let us ask the Lord to free the Church from those who would make her grow old, encase her in the past, hold her back or keep her at a standstill. But let us also ask him to free her from another temptation: that of thinking she is young because she accepts everything the world offers her, thinking that she is renewed because she sets her message aside and acts like everybody else. No! The Church is young when she is herself, when she receives ever anew the strength born of God's word, the Eucharist, and the daily presence of Christ and the power of his Spirit in our lives"* (35).

The Pope then goes back to one of the teachings most dear to him and, explaining that the figure of Jesus must be presented *"in an attractive and effective way", says: "the Church should not be excessively caught up in herself but instead, and above all, reflect Jesus Christ. This means humbly acknowledging that some things concretely need to change"* (39).

Paragraph forty is blunt and forthright, not all young people are excited at the idea of an active role in the life of the church. Sometimes if we are honest, young people may be put off *"for serious and understandable reasons: sexual and financial scandals; a clergy ill-prepared to engage effectively with the sensitivities of the young; ... the passive role assigned to the young within the Christian community; the Church's difficulty in explaining her doctrine and ethical positions to contemporary society"* (40).

## Summary Continued...

Pope Francis then shifts the conversation to the young people who *"want a Church that listens more, that does more than simply condemn the world. They do not want to see a Church that is silent and afraid to speak, but neither one that is always battling obsessively over two or three issues. To be credible to young people, there are times when she needs to regain her humility and simply listen, recognizing that what others have to say can provide some light to help her better understand the Gospel"* (41). Francis concludes this reflection with this beautiful insight: a Church that is too fearful can be constantly critical of *"efforts to defend the rights of women, and constantly point out the risks and the potential errors of those demands"*, while a Church that is *"a living Church, can react by being attentive to the legitimate claims of women"*, while *"not agreeing with everything some feminist groups propose"* (42).

Finally at the conclusion of the chapter, Francis presents *"Mary, the young woman from Nazareth"*, and her Yes as that of *"someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise. So I ask each one of you: do you see yourselves as the bearers of a promise?"* (44) For Mary, *"challenges were no reason to say 'no'", and thus putting herself at stake, she became "the influencer of God"*. His last words to the youth of the church is to encourage them to explore the young saints whose lives and ministry are at the heart of the church.

## Thoughts for your own reflection

What is your response to Pope Francis invitation to explore the adolescent and early adult years of Jesus?

Jesus teaches not from afar but from "within your very youth." What do you think Pope Francis means with this insight? What does it mean for how we do ministry with young people?

What is your response to paragraph forty? In the next paragraph (41), Pope Francis suggests a church and pastoral ministry to young people that listens. What do we need to do to encourage and support the kind of active listening that he is asking for?