Homily for 25th Sunday 2015
September 20, 2015
Readings: Wis. 2:12-20, Ps. 54, Js 3:16-4:3, Mk. 9:30-37
Place: Christ the King Seminary for NU students’ retreat
Theme; Growing in knowing Jesus
Mood: Encouraging

How well do you know Jesus? … Intellectually and experientially? .. None of us knows Our Lord very well. I base this judgment on two principles. First, “the more you know, the more you know you don’t know.” Second, “the holier any saint becomes, the more he realizes how immeasurably distant he is from God’s holiness.” Our overwhelming attitude deserves to be one of humility in relating to God, and to God’s incarnate son, Jesus.

We’ve been reading from St. Mark’s Gospel during this liturgical year. Time and again, Mark reports Jesus’ thinking, feeling and stating clearly that he does not want people to know who he is … yet. Scripture scholars explain this Markan “secret” as Jesus’ recognition that people would misunderstand his mission and message: people would perceive him as a worldly Messiah who comes to establish worldly power and wealth.

In this morning’s gospel, Jesus knows that his chosen Twelve are discussing “which of them is the greatest.” Jesus probably shook his head in disbelief at their spiritual ignorance. He called them to himself, and instructed his disciples, “whoever wants to be first, should become the last of all, and the servant of all.” That is completely opposite from what the apostles had been arguing about. Then Jesus placed a child on his lap and said, “whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.” Let’s ponder our Christian vocation to take care of the children in our midst. … Let’s consider the great sin of abortion, and the great evil committed by Planned Parenthood in aborting babies and selling baby’s body parts. Luke renders Mark’s statement in this fashion, “whoever receives the least of you, receives me.” Let’s ponder those currently among the least, namely, families who are suffering in countless ways, … refugees who are fleeing their homelands, … people suffering natural disasters such as the great earthquake and resultant tsunami at Chile.

Jesus teaches us that the ways in which we receive the least amongst us is the way that we receive and meet him. … Try to see Jesus in people with least status: classmates on the fringe of the university crowd, the housekeeping staff who clean up after you, the cafeteria workers who serve you, and friends who are suffering in any way. By reaching out to people in greatest need and with least status occasions us to encounter the heart of Jesus. And in meeting Jesus, we meet the Father who sent him.

A story exemplifying Catholic and Vincentian spirit. When I was teaching at NU before you were born, a Board member, now deceased, was driving the priest-president of NU on Main St. in downtown Niagara Falls. Unexpectedly the Board member suddenly steered his car to the curb, parked the car, jumped out of the car, and at curbside lifted a man who was lying down in the curb. In the intervening moments, a
bus had pulled into the curbside, and outgoing and incoming passengers began stepping over the prostrate man lying in the curb.

When the Board member returned to the car, the president commented that he had not seen the man in the curb, and asked the Board member why he had reacted so instantaneously. The Board member replied, “You Vincentians taught me to do these things. The poor fellow in the curb could have been lying there for countless reasons: maybe he was a drunkard, a drug addict, a victim of a crime, a sick person who collapsed there, a mentally ill homeless person. It doesn’t matter. He’s God’s child, and therefore, my brother in Christ.”

Students, whoever receives the least person as Jesus does, receives Jesus, and furthers that individual’s process of growing in knowing Jesus.