

Homily – October 4, 2026

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.

I wonder what Paul really means when he says, “I want to know Christ.” I mean, is that really the cry of one wanting more scholarly knowledge of Christ?

I’m guessing that it really isn’t. Because we know Paul’s story. We know that he got to know Jesus intimately on that dusty road, not in a library or in a university.

Until that moment of meeting on the dusty road, Paul was persecuting Christians. But after that meeting on the dusty road, everything in Paul’s ministry and mission changed. It became about his life being dedicated to the proclamation in word and deed of the gospel of our Lord and Savior.

That acclamation and proclamation of God’s saving grace in word and deed is actually because Paul met the risen Christ. In the meeting, in the knowing, things got and do get changed. What we think about God, what we think about others, and what we think about ourselves all change in the meeting with God.

When we meet God in the sacraments, in the bread and wine, when we meet God in the scriptures and hear God’s story for God’s people, life is changed. We see in each of Paul’s letters to the different churches that he started the story of his encounter with God and the knowledge that meeting God, knowing God intimately, does indeed change everything.

His confidence is the first thing that changed after meeting Jesus. Before that, he had confidence in who he was, confidence in his pedigree, confidence in his willpower to keep the rules. He even had confidence in persecuting the church.

But when he met Jesus on that dusty road, everything changed.

His confidence shifted to confidence in his Lord and Savior. Paul’s way of thinking changed. What was gain is now loss. What was foolishness before has now, for Paul, become foundational. New insight was gained for him by this faithful living.

You can almost hear Paul saying, “God is in Christ and Christ is in me.” It’s true. God is trustworthy. Paul certainly was clear after that dusty road experience: there is a better confidence to have than our own confidence, and that is confidence in our Lord and Savior. There is a value that surpasses all value in knowing Christ Jesus.

Paul knew Christ Jesus in a new way. He had already known stories of Christ through the scriptures. He had been educated beyond what most people had at that time. But he said, “I want to really know Christ.” This is the cry of someone who has discovered that faith is not merely information, not merely being able to quote Bible verses, but that it is a relationship. It is trust. It is being united with the living Christ.

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Martin Luther understood this as well. Luther certainly knew his theology. He knew the Bible. But what transformed his life wasn't about getting more information. What transformed his life was discovering that Christ was not waiting for him to become worthy, but Christ came for him, the sinner. Luther discovered that righteousness is not something we can achieve no matter how hard we try. No matter how hard we try, it is not achieved on our own. It is received through knowing Christ, knowing God's love, knowing God's mercy, and knowing God's grace.

Paul spent a lot of years trying to establish his own righteousness, his whole religious resume.

Yet just a few verses before our text today, he says he counts all of it as loss compared to the surpassing value of really knowing Christ.

Sometimes we want to depend on the belief that our standing before God rests on our effort, our morality, our achievements, or our religious commitment. Paul says no.

Christ is enough. His resurrection is enough. His grace is enough. That changes everything. May our lives be changed by truly knowing God. Amen.