



# Relationship with GOD

## More than Just SUNDAY

### Thanksgiving

**A**s we approach Thanksgiving, we all know that we have many things for which we need to be thankful. There is one preeminent reason that stands above and before all others. That is God's gift of Himself to us in the Person of His Son Jesus, who is our Savior and Lord. Through Jesus not only is it possible to receive forgiveness for our sins, but our relationship with God is restored and very real and personal. Practically speaking, what does that look like? Let me share my story.

During college, I had an interesting experience of learning to be more grateful. I spent my junior year abroad, studying at an Institute in Nantes, France. My goal was to earn a degree in French in order to teach high school. Therefore, I wanted to become fluent in speaking the language.

There was another student in the program whom I got to know reasonably well. Paula loved Jesus and was intent on assisting me to realize that Jesus died on the cross for me, personally. My practice of the faith at this point included going to Mass every Sunday and praying every night in bed, even though I would usually fall asleep after 30 seconds of "prayer time." My perception of faith was more about following rules and trying to do what was right and good in order to earn my way to Heaven.

During the school week, between classes, I would enter into conversation with Paula, about various topics regarding the French people and the

culture, as well as art, architecture, poetry and other classes that we were taking. Occasionally, Paula would speak about Jesus, and His incredible love for me. I would listen and think about it a bit, but really my focus was on seeing as much of Europe that was possible during that year.

While in France, I lived with a family in which the father worked for the government, so their residence was located in a government-owned building. I had a bedroom to myself that overlooked a busy traffic center that was circular with a large obelisk in the middle and many streets entering off the sides of the circle, looking like the spokes of a bicycle wheel. I will always remember the view from my window because one morning after waking up early, I was looking out the long windows and there was a profound moment when, through God's grace, I came to understand that Jesus died on the cross for me. Somehow I knew that this was not just something that I figured out intellectually, but God allowed me to "know" it in the depths of my heart. And this experience totally changed my perspective.

What I came to understand was Catholic Christianity is not simply a set of rules, but that it is first a love story, a relationship with Jesus Christ who loves each one of us like a priceless treasure and He gave His life for each person. I can know Him and develop a friendship with Him through times of daily prayer. And most importantly, I came to realize

my need for Jesus as my Savior. In dying upon the Cross, Jesus bridges the gap between God and me. I need God not just when I face a crisis, but at all times because He rescues me from sin and death. And this is true for every person. This life is not about "earning" my way to Heaven, because I can't earn it. God gives it to me freely through Jesus Christ. I need the power of His grace to stay close to Him, to be faithful in daily prayer and to be strengthened to follow Him more closely.

On Thanksgiving Day and beyond, please consider taking some time to thank Jesus for dying on the cross so that your sins could be forgiven. Feel free to ask Him to allow you to "know" this fact in the depths of your heart; to know that He died for you personally out of love. Jesus is with you in your joys and struggles, and He can bring healing, forgiveness and deeper meaning to your life. Don't be afraid to ask Him to show you personally that He is real and what He has done for you; Ask Him to reveal your need for Him, not just generally, but as the only way to eternal life with God in Heaven. Ask and you shall receive: Jesus loves to answer this prayer! This is the truth that makes Thanksgiving happy.

Ann Lankford  
Director for Catechesis and  
Evangelization



DIocese OF  
LA CROSSE