



PRAYER CHANGES THINGS

How Real is Jesus to You?

Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? We Catholics tend to dismiss that as a Protestant question. If we answer it at all, we have learned to say that of course we have a personal relationship with Jesus, because we receive His grace through the Sacraments, beginning with Baptism. And we receive Jesus Himself most profoundly in Holy Communion. We know this by faith.

That is all true, but the question wants to know if we have a sense of personal connection, of familiarity, with Jesus, similar to the feeling of connection we have with a spouse, a family member or a really close friend. Because unfortunately it is possible to experience our sacramental encounters with Jesus in a way that is mechanical, impersonal, detached from the heart.

Of course it is clear that we can see and touch and speak with family members and friends in an immediate and obvious way, while God is invisible to us, or hidden under the appearances of bread and wine. But that handicap doesn't get us off the hook, because God has a key to our hearts that is more powerful and available than anyone else.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that He is the Vine and we must be joined to Him as branches. In fact He tells us that that is the only way our lives can bear fruit. Listen to the intimate language He uses: "Remain in Me, as I remain in you.... Remain in My love" (15:4,9).

Then consider the invitation in the Book of Revelation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with Me" (3:20).

It really is mind-boggling – Jesus, the Only-Begotten Son of God, is knocking on the door of our lives, inviting us to the most profound friendship. But He will not force His way in. It is up to us. If we open, He is sure to respond.

Many men and women in the history of the Church have opened the door to Jesus and chosen to remain in His love. Their relationship with Him has been the center of their lives every single day, and they have experienced the joy and fulfillment our hearts were made for. Think of St. Francis of

Assisi, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Padre Pio, St. Faustina – the list goes on and on. Have they experienced also times of spiritual dryness and suffering? Of course, but Jesus never stopped being the love of their lives and the source of all meaning and fulfillment.

It is false modesty to say that their path is not our path, that we are just "ordinary" people. There is only one real path in life, and it is that of a living, breathing, close friendship with Jesus, Who told us, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). After much searching along false paths, St. Augustine finally discovered this truth and cried out with joy, "O Lord, you have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in You."

How to get there? Is it too much for us?

Just ask. "Jesus, please help me to know You better. I don't want to just know about You, I want to know You." Talk to Him often during the day, tell Him your joys, your troubles, your hopes.

Read slowly from the Gospels, meditating on the words and deeds of Jesus, asking Him to help you to see how they apply to you. Then rest in silence and listen. Do this for a few minutes each day. Visit Jesus in Eucharistic adoration, awakening your devotion with prayer, Scripture and silent contemplation. Find inspiration in reading about the saints.

Ask Jesus to help you see and touch Him in works of mercy toward the poor, the homeless, the lonely. Ask His forgiveness in Confession. Make your heart ready each time you receive Him in Communion. Begin and end your day by giving yourself to Jesus. Ask Mary to help you.

In all this, you will not be perfect, you will stumble. Keep going. Yes, you are busy, but set aside some time each day. Because He is EVERYTHING, and in your heart of hearts you know that remaining in His Love is exactly what your life should be about.

