

Prayer Changes Things



Personally Encountering Jesus

Recently I had the opportunity to work with a group of young adults from Eastern Europe, coming from such countries as the Ukraine, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and as far away as Russia and China. The youth were recommended by their bishop to attend a year-long immersion course in English and the Catholic Faith at the Language & Catechetical Institute (LCI).

The Director told me why it is important for these students to learn English. Their experience of living under communist rule included being prohibited from practicing and receiving formation in the Faith. And currently they witness a Godless culture that has been in place for the past 100 years. One example of the effects of communism is that those who live their Catholic Faith are not allowed to go to the University, and therefore, they cannot get a decent job. However, upon completion of their immersion experience, when these young people return to their countries knowing fluent English, they can rise to the top and find excellent jobs. So this provides a way around the “system”, while also equipping these young men and women to live out their Catholic Faith in a deeply committed way.

During my time with the group, I was asked to lead them through English exercises, providing a means to hear and speak the language in an ongoing manner, and to provide occasions for them to encounter Jesus. This combination provided a means to get to know them well.

As a way to combine both of these goals, we embarked on praying with a Scripture passage each day, using a simple worksheet, referred to as *lectio divina*. After reading through a specific passage a few times, the group was invited to choose a person in the story to whom they could relate. For example, in Matthew Chapter 8, verses 23-27, the persons include Jesus and the Apostles, who were in a boat while a great storm arose with waves threatening to drown them. The Apostles were overcome with fear while Jesus was asleep in the boat.

After choosing one person, the Praying with Scripture worksheet then asks three questions: “How does it feel to be in this situation?” “Does it remind you of something or someone in your life?” and “Is there anything you would say or do differently?” In answering these questions, it becomes apparent that the Holy Spirit has made a connection between the Scripture passage and one’s own life. This connection could be something that happened yesterday, two months ago, or ten years ago. And most

importantly, it provides a personal encounter with Jesus.

The young people were invited to relate how they answered these questions. It stirred each of us to the heart to hear how God brought to mind real-life experiences. A young nun shared how the people gathered for prayer as troops advanced toward her town in the Kosovo war but the military then reversed their course; a young man related that he was finding peace in his heart about difficult family situations by giving it to Jesus in prayer; a nurse came to understand that putting an end to the lives of sick or dying persons (euthanasia) can never be accepted; and a young woman shed tears for what her people are enduring in China, but committed to pray for her country with trust in our Lord.

The time spent with these young adults has confirmed for me what the Church has been expressing through the *Catechism* and numerous other documents, as well as through the teachings of the last several popes. “This Practice of praying with Scripture will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Sept. 16, 2005).

If you are interested in a simple Praying with Scripture worksheet, go to diolc.org/deeper.

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