



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 He comes to us through the Sacraments, and most profoundly in Communion.

But the question goes deeper. It asks: do we have a sense of connection, of familiarity, with Jesus, like the feeling of connection we have with a spouse, a family member or a close friend? Sadly, it is possible to experience our sacramental encounters with Jesus in a way that is mechanical, impersonal, detached from the heart.

Of course we can see, touch, and speak with family members and friends in an immediate way, while God is invisible to us, or hidden under the appearances of bread and wine. And yet God has a powerful key to our hearts.

A mind-boggling invitation

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that He is the Vine and we must be joined to Him as branches. 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."

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

Others have gone before us

Men and women throughout history have opened that door and remained in Jesus' love. They have embraced Him as the center of their lives and experienced the joy and fulfillment our hearts were made for. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Padre Pio, St. Faustina – the list goes on and on. Did they sometimes experience spiritual dryness and suffering? Of course, but Jesus never stopped being the center of their lives.

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, that of a living, breathing friendship with Jesus, Who told us, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). After much wandering, St. Augustine finally discovered that truth and cried out with joy, "O Lord, you have made us for

Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in You."

Keys to deepen that relationship

Let's start by simply asking, "Jesus, please help me to know You better. I don't want to just know *about* You, I want to *know* You." Begin and end your day by giving yourself to Him, and talk to Him often, telling Him your joys, your troubles, your hopes. Read slowly from the Gospels, meditating on Jesus' words and deeds, asking Him to help you 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. 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.

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