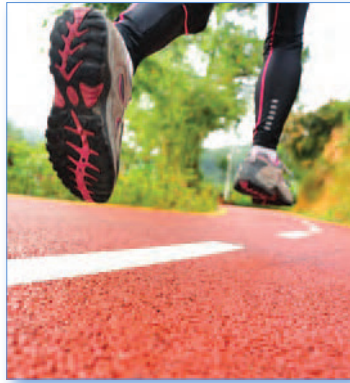


Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer and Spirituality

5. Following



Way-In

These pictures show people pursuing different activities. They are typical of some of the things most of us do most days; working, shopping, leisure, looking after each other. Some of the activities we undertake each day because we have to, others we do for ourselves and some we do for the sake of other people; some are very active, others more passive, some we enjoy and others we loathe. Some are relatively straight-forward, others present us with real challenges. God's presence is there in all of them and we are called to respond.

Reflect-&-Jot



Take time to think about your normal daily routine; the things you do. You might like to make a list or to draw a 'map' of a typical day. What gives you energy and what saps it? Why? How do you normally respond to life's ups and downs. Make a note about this in your journal or file.

Inside-The-Text

We continue with our Gospel account of the conversation between Peter and Jesus. When we left it Jesus had asked Peter three questions and Peter had made his response. We continue now with a reminder of that last question.

Jesus said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time 'Do you love me?' He said to him 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

(John 21:17-19)

Reflect-&-Jot



Read the passage two or three times. In the two-way dialogue between Peter and Jesus, Peter professes his love for Jesus and is then challenged to follow him. As far as you can, try and put yourself in Peter's place. Note down what would be your reaction to what Jesus says to you.

Digging-Deeper

This conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter has come a long way from where it began. Jesus has challenged Peter with the three questions. Twice he has asked if Peter really loved him. In Greek there are several words we translate in English with the one word, love, and the word used by Jesus in his first two questions is the strongest possible one (agapan). It was as if Jesus was asking, 'Simon, do you really, really love me?' But Peter uses a different word for love in his reply (philein). His word does not have nearly such a strong force. It is as if Peter says, 'Yes Lord, you know I really, really care deeply about you.' Perhaps Peter is so acutely aware of how he has failed to really love in the past that he can't bring himself to give the assurances he fears he will never be able to keep. This third question is different. This time Jesus switches from the 'strong' word for love and uses the same 'weaker' word Peter has used.

Spirituality and Action The command to Peter to 'Feed my sheep' is a particular and unique calling. He is to shepherd, tend and feed the flock that is the Church. But there is something else here that applies to every Christian. Peter is asked first to love the Lord and then feed the sheep. In the same way we are asked first to love and then to act. The love of God is the root of all the apostolic work that follows. It is at the basis of all our service.

Self giving love As the passage unfolds Jesus has some strong words to say about the cost of this love. In effect Jesus says to Peter that, whereas previously he could make up his own mind about things and do what he wanted, in the future it will be very different. He will end up out of control of his own destiny and others will determine his fate.

The Paschal Mystery We are not alone on this self giving path of committed love for the Lord which will lead us down paths both joyful and difficult. When we were baptised we became part of the body of Christ and we share in his life. He lives in us. This means that he acts in us and suffers in us and is alive in us. We call what Jesus did in his death and resurrection the paschal mystery. This we celebrate at every Mass and in union with him live out this mystery in our everyday lives. It is because Christ is alive in us, that we share in this mystery.

Adoration & Worship We sometimes think of praise and adoration as merely telling God how wonderful he is. God is wonderful but adoring God is much more than telling him that. It is two things. It is an attitude of mind which acknowledges the supremacy of God. It locates God where God should be, at the root and summit of everything; at the centre of our lives. Secondly, our lives themselves give praise to God. When we live a life of self-giving love that itself is an act of adoration and worship.

Follow me This part of the narrative ends with the command of Christ, to 'follow me.' There is something very profound in the way this is recorded. Things happen in an ordered way. Jesus asks the big question first, do you love me? Next he commands Peter to feed my sheep then to follow me. This order is significant. Peter is called first to commit himself in love for his Lord. Out of this love he is to actively care for the flock. Finally he is reminded that he will only be able to care for the flock faithfully if he follows the way of Jesus.

Reflect-&-Jot



Think for a while about your response to Jesus's question 'Do you love me?'

- What word (or phrase) would you use in reply? Explore its various meanings in your journal.
- Recall and record a time when your faith cost you something. Why did you pay the price? If you cannot think of any such time don't feel guilty! Just as important is to think about what helps you remain faithful in the ups and downs of everyday.
- Gather together some photos or pictures or articles about people you think are serving Christ in different ways.
- What is most difficult for you about following Christ? You might find it helpful to do this by using just one word.

Inside-Out

Intercessory Prayer We have seen that prayer and service are both integral to what it means to follow Christ. Our spirituality also says that we serve one another by praying for each other and for the whole of God's world. We often call this intercessory prayer.

Contemplative & Apostolic This balance between the inner (what we might call 'contemplative') and the outer ('apostolic'), aspects of our spirituality is not always easy to keep. Of course this balance may vary at different times in our lives depending on our circumstances. Nevertheless we should ask the question 'is the balance right for me now?'

Putting-It-All-Together

Catholic spirituality says:

- A self giving committed love for God and for others is central to our lives.
- Christ lives in us and so we live out the life, death and resurrection, the paschal mystery, in our own lives.
- God is at work, loving us in the deep inner core of each of us so that our love for him and others can grow.
- Our inner life, hidden with Christ, and the outer manifestation of that relationship are two sides of one coin; they are inseparable.
- Our spirituality is both contemplative and apostolic, we are called to keep looking at the Lord and at the needs of others.
- Working for a better world, building the Kingdom and caring for others, is a non-negotiable element of our spirituality. Praying for others is part of our service to them.
- God does not wait for us to reach a certain level of holiness before calling us to act.

Pray-A-Psalm

This psalm expresses several things. It is a thanksgiving for God's ever-present love and a prayer that we may stay close to God in good times and bad. Read it prayerfully and see what aspect of the psalm means most to you. Make it your own prayer by using your own words to express to God what it says to you.

*Incline your ear O Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.*

(Read Psalm 86:1-2, 11-17 in your bible)

These handouts contain core readings, reflections and pictures from individual chapters of *Do You Love Me?* and are intended as an introduction to, or a recap of, or a simplified use of the guide.



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