

Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer and Spirituality

4. Conversing

Introduction

We all know what it is like when our communication with another person breaks down and how uncomfortable that makes us feel. We also know what it is like to have a really good conversation with someone; the sort of conversation where we are so deeply engrossed that time flies. Sometimes we come away from such conversations knowing that the encounter has changed the way we think about things or knowing that in some way we have been deeply enriched.

Way-In

Here are some pictures of people in conversation with each other.



Reflect-&-Jot



Jot down what these pictures say to you about what makes for good conversation?

Take time to think about a significant conversation you have had. You might like to find a photo, if you have one, of the person with whom you had the conversation and put it in your journal to remind you of it. Make a few notes about why the conversation was so important to you?

Inside-The-Text

When we left the risen Lord meeting the disciples on the beach, they were all eating breakfast. Here is what happens next.

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He 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?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John

21:15-17)

This passage gives us an account of the intimate conversation between Jesus and Peter. It was a conversation which it is unlikely Peter ever forgot.

Reflect-&-Jot



What do you notice about this conversation?

Digging-Deeper

We have already seen that Catholic spirituality is centred on a relationship with Christ. As we have seen in the previous chapter the relationship with God grows and develops in all sorts of ways and this can happen through the many and various opportunities that come our way. However, throughout the centuries our spirituality explores what it means for the Christian to be in dialogue with the Lord; having a conversation. When people talk about prayer this is often what they mean.

Prayer – A Genuine Conversation To begin with it is worth noting that it is Jesus who initiates this conversation and he does it by using Peter's original name. "Simon, son of John". Names are more significant than we often realise. Our name is intimately connected to our identity, which is why we often get upset if it is misused or abused. Some of us are called one name by acquaintances and another by our closest family and friends. We don't like it if people who don't really know us use our most familiar name; that is usually reserved for the people who know us really well; those with whom we have some sort of relationship. Jesus calls us by that familiar name because our relationship with him is unique and intimate. He does the same with Peter, he calls him by the name he was given at birth, Simon.

Prayer – Conversing With the Real Jesus Some people see Jesus as little more than a good man, or an example for us to follow, or even a good man raised from the dead. But the Church says he is far more than that. Other people see Jesus as "God dressed up as a human being", who, because he is God, cannot be aware of what it is really like to be human, but the Church says that is not right either. Jesus is both truly human and truly divine. He is not one more than the other. He

is God and man. It may be hard to understand this but we need to be able to grasp such truth because it affects how our conversation goes.

Prayer - A Continuing Conversation The conversation between Peter and the Lord continues. Peter responds to the question Jesus asked. He affirms his love for Christ with the words, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." This is not a wishy-washy expression of feeling. In fact it has little to do with feelings at all. Peter is saying yes to Christ, knowing that in the past he had said no. Just as he had three times denied Jesus so this conversation, which contains three questions, restores him. Now he has the chance to affirm his commitment. So Jesus repeats his question twice more. "Simon, son of John do you love me?" And each time Peter responds.

Reflect-&-Jot



In your journal, or on your computer, record a time (if you can think of one) when you knew that God had something to say to you.

- What makes conversation with the Lord difficult or problematic or, at the moment, impossible for you? Is there something that gets in the way? Be honest and record it in some way.
- What ONE thing would you want to say most? Say it in your journal in whatever way you wish (words, poems, photos etc).
- God calls us by name. Let yourself be called by your name. You might want to write out your name in some way in your journal.

Try-One-Of-These

- Before you begin your conversation spend a while just thinking about both the wonder of who you are about to address. Then open the conversation using the name of Jesus, the name Joseph and Mary gave him.
- Jesus said that he and the Father are one (John 14:11). He used the familiar name any child used for her or his father, "Abba". We can use it too (Romans 8:15). Before conversing with God try repeating that name quietly and slowly in your head for a few moments. Take your time.
- Think of a time when something wonderful happened to you, when something moved you deeply. Open your conversation with words of thanks to the Lord of all. Jot down what happened in your journal.

Putting-It-All-Together

Catholic spirituality says:

- Our relationship with God is not one of equals. We are in dialogue with God, Father, Son and Spirit but at the same time our conversations are unique and intimate; conversations in which God calls us by name.
- Conversing involves both listening and speaking. Both are essential in our prayer.
- Our conversation with God brings us closer and helps us say "yes" to whatever is being asked of us. We may be faced with challenges to our way of life as a result of our prayer. We are called to action.
- We can converse with the Lord anywhere, anytime.
- We have resources through which the Lord speaks to us and through which we can respond. Among these, Scripture is a primary source but we also have a wealth of other treasures on which we can draw. These come from within our tradition and beyond.
- We have some guidelines which we can employ to make sure we are not deluding ourselves.

Pray-A-Psalm

One of the greatest gifts the psalms offer to us is that they give us words to use when we are finding it difficult to express how we feel. Here are two psalms. The first is a wonderful psalm if all is going well for you. It is a prayer of thanksgiving the words of which we can use to speak to God of our gratitude. The second is part of psalm 88 which many people have found helpful when things are going or have gone wrong. It is a psalm of lament, the words of which we can use to speak to God of our pain and distress. Choose which one is right for you and pray it.

A psalm of thanksgiving

*O come let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great king above all gods.
In his hands are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.*

(Psalm 95)

A psalm of lament

*O Lord, God of my salvation,
when at night, I cry out in your presence,
Let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead.*

(Psalm 88)

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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