

Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer and Spirituality

Chapter 2. Recognising

Introduction

In our last chapter we saw how the search for meaning and the fulfilment of our deepest longings and desires is part of our spirituality and leads us forward. In this chapter we shall reflect on the "who" at the centre of all Catholic spirituality and we shall explore something of what being in relationship with that "who" means for each one of us.



Way-In

Here are three very different pictures. They have nothing in common. We can probably easily recognise what two of them are about although the chances are we will react to them in different ways. For instance the first one may make us think of the silence that happens when it snows or it may remind us of our childhood snowball fights. Some of us may find the middle one joyful because it brings back happy memories. For some it may remind us of something quite painful. The third one is not so obvious. Some people may be bemused by it, others like the colours, others the shape. Some may be challenged by it.



Reflect-&-Jot

Take your time to really look at the pictures and jot down (or draw!) what you recognise in them and what they bring to mind. What attracts you and what confuses you?

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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Inside-The-Text

We continue with our Gospel account of Peter by the sea. When we left him Peter was out in the boat with nothing to show for a night of fishing. Here is what happens next.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn.

(John 21:4-11)

There are three main characters here, Peter, the disciple Jesus loved (usually we call him John) and Jesus himself.

Reflect-&-Jot



Read the passage two or three times. What strikes you about it?

What do you see in it? It doesn't matter how strange it may seem - jot it down.

Recognising

Nevertheless something is happening and in the Gospel we read about that moment of recognition. John is the first to recognise that it is Jesus on the shore. Everything that follows stems from that. At the centre of our spirituality is not a "what to do" or a "how to do it" but a "who". It is a person, the person of Christ. This is a non-negotiable element in our spirituality. If in our prayer and devotions we have not recognised who it is that is before us, we have missed the point. "It is the Lord" says John. John has this flash of recognition, not on his knees in a quiet place but as he is hauling in the net. We can have what we might call recognition moments too. They happen when something occurs, or something is said, or we see something and we just know something special is being shown to us. Our spirituality helps us to see not only what this is but who is there and to respond "It is the Lord". Here is a description of one such moment:

"I was washing up after breakfast just enjoying that peaceful moment as the house emptied. I don't know what I was thinking but I became aware of a ripple of light through the window as the winter sun popped above the fence. In that moment I knew I was not

alone and that God was with me. It was just a moment, but the ordinary joy of that moment, the sense of being loved and accepted, has stayed strong and clear over many long years. It was as if God had said 'Good Morning' just to me."

The next character we meet is Peter. Once John has pointed Jesus out Peter literally leaps into action. He is so anxious to get to Jesus that he throws himself into the sea taking only enough time to grab the essentials. He just can't wait. He doesn't stop to try and get his act together before making for land. Our spirituality says that once we see who his person is there is a real desire to be with him. This is what our hearts have been searching for. Nothing will stop Peter and nothing should stop us; not the awareness of our failures, nor the fact that we have nothing but what God has given us in our hands. It may be fanciful to imagine it but perhaps there was a smile to the face of the risen Lord as he watched the sheer recklessness of Peter's action. For Peter, and for every Christian, nothing else is needed apart from this recognising and being with Christ because everything else stems from it.



Reflect-&-Jot



Here are some pictures of Jesus. You will probably like some more than others. Take your time to look at them. What is it you see in the pictures? In other words what might each one tell you about who Jesus is for you?

- Recall a time when, looking back now, you can recognise the presence of Christ with you – even if you didn't see him at the time.
- Who has been John for you - helping you to recognise the Lord?
- Who has been Peter for you - helping you to put your prayer into action?

Inside-Out

Recognising the Lord and making our way towards him, which is at the centre of our spirituality, is no easy task. Jesus calls us and accompanies us every step of the way and he has given us some treasures to help us on the journey. Jesus talked about a wise person knowing how to bring out from the treasury things old and new. (Matthew 13:52)

Reflect-&-Jot



Reflect on the experiences of praying with others which you have had. Put down whatever comes to mind for you.

- Which of the saints is especially important to you? Why?
- How do you think they help you see and respond to God?
- When have the prayers of others meant a lot to you?
- What did they mean for you?

Pray-A-Psalm

Pray the psalm with your heart, making it your own prayer. (It is part of psalm 139.) It speaks of God knowing us through and through and that there is nowhere we can go where God cannot be met, recognised and known. If you wish you might like to read it out loud prayerfully two or three times putting different emphasis on different words each time. Then take time to savour them and hear what God is saying to you.

*O Lord you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high I cannot attain it.*

Putting-It-All-Together

Catholic spirituality says:

- Christ accompanies us but we don't always recognise him. He is the stranger on the shore.
- Christ sees us before we see him and calls us to our own unique spiritual path.
- We often come to the point of recognition ("It is the Lord") gradually; the call to grow in relationship takes time.
- The centre of our spirituality is a who - the person of Christ. We are called to recognise him (like John) and respond (like Peter).
- The desire to be in relationship with God, in Christ, lies at the heart of our spirituality because everything else springs from it.
- Our spiritual path is made in the company of others, here on earth and in heaven.