

Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer and Spirituality

1. Searching

Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He then said to Simon Peter a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' Jesus said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was distressed that Jesus had said to him a 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)

Introduction

Many of us have a head full of unanswered questions to which we would dearly love to know the answers. Some of these are very personal and unique to us; some are questions which human beings have always asked. Many of us also have wish lists, things we would really like to happen; some are mundane and not very important but others are much deeper in us. We all have longings and desires deep in the heart of us but we don't often put them into words. Catholic spirituality says these are very important and, in this chapter, we will be looking at what our spirituality has to say about this inner search for meaning and longing and how it is a part of the spirituality of each one of us.

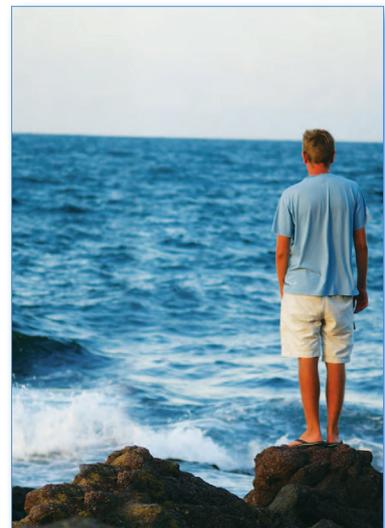
Way In

This person is doing what a lot of us do when we get the opportunity; taking a bit of time out. We can't know what thoughts are going on inside as he watches the waves crash on to the shore.

Here are some possibilities:

- Perhaps thinking about the family.
- Perhaps struggling to find answers to why a loved one is ill or had died. Perhaps just feeling a bit lost and wondering where life is going, why he is there at all and what life is all about.
- Perhaps being aware of the wonder of creation and being caught up in it perhaps inside there is a heart full of longing for something or someone that can't quite be put into words - questions about where the longing comes from or why it is there.

Who knows what he is thinking?



Reflect & Jot



If you were standing by this person watching the regular waves beating against the shore what would be your thoughts or questions?

Inside the Text

Here from St John's Gospel is part of an account about someone else standing by the sea. The incident takes place just after the resurrection and it is about Peter.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

(John 21:1-3)

Peter had been through a series of devastating events. Post-traumatic stress is nothing new! We cannot know exactly what was going through his head but we can perhaps imagine it. Jesus, the person he had trusted and loved so much had died a very public, painful and shameful death. It had all happened so quickly and no doubt Peter's grief was compounded by the fact that he never got to say the things he wanted to say. Why did Jesus have to die? Why did God let it happen? What sort of God is this anyway? And now there's all this talk of the resurrection and those appearances that seemed to be the Jesus he knew of old and yet how could that be? We can't know whether big questions like these were in Peter's head before he gets into the boat but we do know what he does. Like many of us when grief hits, Peter decides to do something. He gets busy. Life has to go on so he goes back to his old job. There is something very comforting in returning to the familiar routine. So he and his companions go fishing. If Peter thinks he is going to be cheered up by a good return for all his hard labour he is sorely disappointed. It's a disaster. They catch nothing.



Reflect & Jot

If you were Peter what would you be thinking and feeling?

Digging Deeper

At first sight these verses don't seem to have much to say about spirituality but let's dig a little deeper.

The thirst for someone or something to satisfy our deepest longing lies deep within each of us. It is very deep-seated in us. Catholic spirituality says it is God-given. God has implanted this desire in us. It is a desire for God himself. At the heart of our faith is the knowledge and experience of God's desire for us.

Reflect-Ët-Jot



It is always good to try and put into words (or if you are a visual person, into picture form) what it is you long for in your heart of hearts.

- When have you felt lost?
- What do you really long for above all else?
- What are you searching for?
- What is it like to know "a restlessness of spirit?"

Inside-Out

Peter's response to this situation is to do something. He throws himself into activity. By going fishing he and his companions get on with life as they know it and it is in the middle of that life that things will change. Our spirituality says that living life as we know it is part of our spirituality. It is earthed. This story reminds us that God is found both in the quiet moments where Peter stands on the beach and in the hustle and bustle of our equivalent of fishing. Spirituality is not remote from the way we make decisions, cope with our difficulties, our joys and our grief. The desire to make sense of the life we live and to explore our inner longings is about the whole of us. We find God in both the quiet and in the busyness. Often when we look back over what has happened to us we see that God has been there with us as we have journeyed.

Reflect-Ët-Jot



We find the presence of God in our busyness and in our moments of quiet. Reflect and jot down how you experience this in your own life.

Putting-It-All-Together

Catholic spirituality says:

- The thirst for someone or something to satisfy our deepest longing is God-given. Ultimately it is for God.
- Our searching pushes us forward on our spiritual journey and that journey may take many different paths.
- Our restlessness is valid and it is normal to feel lost.
- Spirituality and the ordinary business of living are intertwined. We should not divorce spirituality and life.

Praying a Psalm

Praying the psalm is more than just reading it slowly. It is reading it with your heart, making it your own prayer. Take some time to slowly pray the psalm. (It is part of psalm 42.) It speaks of the search we are all making and that search is never in vain. If you wish you could select a phrase or a word which stands out for you. Let that stay with you as you go about the rest of the day – or the next day.

*As a deer longs for flowing streams
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?*

- Read more verses from this psalm in your Bible

All Together

If you are using this book as part of a group here are some suggestions about what you might do when you come together. Don't try and do them all; do the ones that seem most appropriate to your group.

- Talk about what emerged for you from this chapter, what you found difficult and what energised you. Share as much or as little as you wish from your own reflection.
- Talk about how you found it trying to find time to work with the material in the chapter.
- Share some examples from films, TV or novels where people are expressing their search for meaning.
- If your life were a novel what would be its title and its main story-line?
- How we can help other people express the search for meaning which drives us to develop our spiritualities.

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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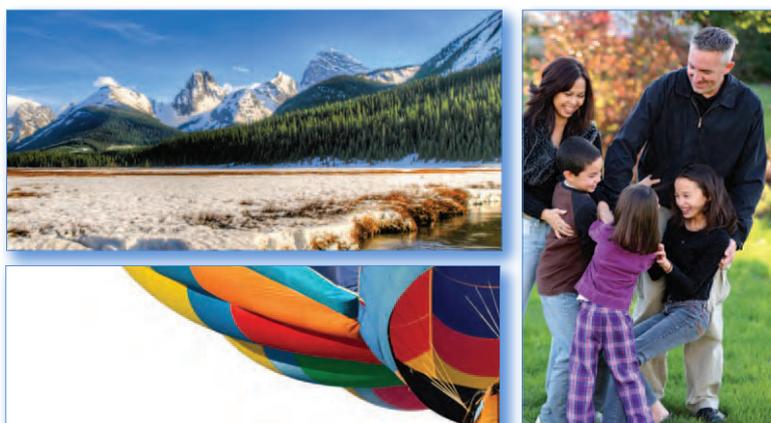
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Chapter 2. Recognising

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?

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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.

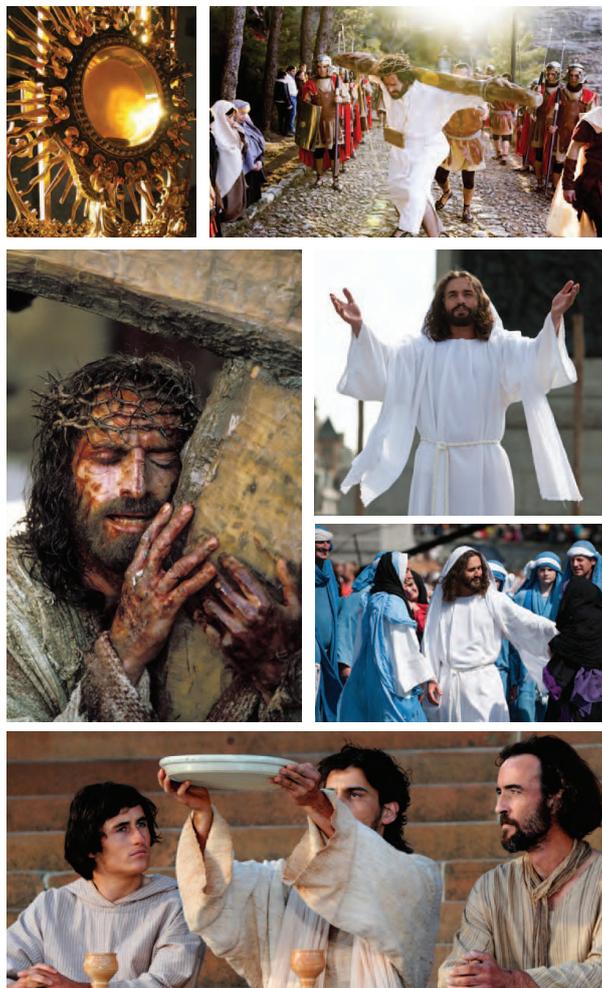
Recognising

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.

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3. Experiencing

Way-In

Here are some pictures which highlight some of the different ways in which we communicate with one another.



We come to know other people through conversing with them. We will think a little more deeply about this way of communicating in our next chapter. We also grow in our friendships in other ways and experience their love through observation, how they act in different situations, through their body language, through touch and through just being with them in companionable silence. Not all communication is obvious. People can get to know each other in all sorts of different ways.

Reflect-&-Jot



Take time to think about a significant relationship in your own life. Jot down the many ways you got to know the other person and what helped that relationship to grow.

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Inside-The-Text

Here is the next part of the chapter from St John's Gospel. When we left Peter and John they and the other disciples had seen the Lord, Peter had jumped out of the boat and made for land while the others brought in the boat. Here is what happens next.

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. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

(John 21:9-14)

We have no idea what went on between Peter and Jesus when Peter gets to the beach before the others. When, however, the boat is dragged up the beach we find, not some great moment of revelation like the Transfiguration, but a humble picnic. There is a fire, something to eat and company. It is in this setting that Jesus communicates with his friends and he does it in several ways.

Reflect-&-Jot



Read the Gospel passage again. Try and picture the scene. If you were there where would you be – who would you be? What would you say? If you like, write the conversation down or sketch yourself in the scene or choose some pictures which would express how you might react to the invitation.

Digging-Deeper

This short Gospel passage is packed with images about how our spirituality helps us to experience the reality of the Lord with us. Let's look at them one at a time and see how they apply to us.

God in the Ordinary First we talked about God using the ordinary to communicate with us. Everything has the potential to speak to us of God, even our failures. It is not just the big things like the birth of a child or the loss of a loved one, it is also in the smaller everyday things of life; the smile someone gives us when we are feeling really down, the laughter we share with a friend, the look on the face of a homeless person. If we make a conscious effort to keep our eyes open we will find God everywhere, drawing us on, conversing with us through others, challenging us through the injustices we see.

Gifts The image of the charcoal fire has its own significance. Jesus has lit a fire for a very pragmatic reason - in order to cook breakfast. He has even provided the food, some fish is already cooking on it. But Jesus also asks the disciples to bring some of the fish they have caught. Our spirituality says that God does both for us.

Breathing spaces Jesus has also lit this fire to provide the disciples with much needed refreshment and rest. Physically they have been fishing all night. No doubt they were very hungry and tired and Jesus responds to this very human need.

Take & Eat Next we hear an invitation, "Come and have breakfast". And here we hear echoes of that other meal where Jesus says "Take, eat". This fish, which the disciples have brought from their own everyday life, is to be the means through which they are fed. In this passage we see a small community (the disciples), the risen Lord and the meal; the same components that we find in every Mass today. This picnic on the beach is not a Eucharist as such but it is an image of what Catholic spirituality has always, believed, known and experienced, namely that at the Eucharist, the followers of Jesus gather with each other around the altar and are fed with the Lord himself.

Silence The next thing that happens is unspoken. The disciples know, "it is the Lord" and, at the same time, they want to know who he is! It seems paradoxical. If they know why do they need to ask? And yet there is an insight here. Sometimes as we grow in our relationship with Jesus we know something deep down but at the same time, can't quite make sense of it. It is then, like the disciples, that we need to leave it unspoken. One of the great treasures in our spirituality is the experience of silence.

Reflect-&-Jot

Look at each of the paragraphs above and underline the things which

- reassure you
-  • surprise you
- challenge you.

Put them in your notebook or on your computer - using your own words if you can.

Inside-Out

Everything we have seen so far is about the means the Lord gives us to grow in relationship with him. Exactly how we do this and how we use the treasures we have been given will be different for each one of us but there are plenty of opportunities to choose from. Let's look at each of the major images we have outlined above and see the different practical ways we can make them our own.

Try-One-Of-These

- Look out for where God is with you today. Keep asking yourself "Was that God I just saw and heard?"
- Tomorrow evening spend a while looking back on the day and asking yourself "Where have I experienced God?"

Putting-It-All-Together

Catholic spirituality says:

- God uses the ordinary, the familiar, the commonplace as ways to meet us.
- God works with the gifts of our own personality and dispositions. We experience what it means to be in relationship with the Lord by praying in the way that is right for us.
- In order to live a balanced life we need to have breathing spaces. • In the Eucharist we are fed and so grow in our relationship with God.
- One of the greatest treasures we have is the gift of silence.



Pray-A-Psalm

Take some time to slowly pray the psalm. (It is psalm 131.) It gives us the image of a relationship of trust, of a fed child, quietly resting in hope. Reflect on what message it gives of the relationship between God and you. Pray about it.

*O Lord my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvellous for me.
But have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul within me is like a weaned child.
O Israel hope in the Lord
from this time on and for evermore.*

All-Together

If you are using this book as part of a group here are some suggestions about how to share reflections on the contents of this chapter and what you might have discovered from it. Pick and choose what suits your group.

- Share stories about how you have discovered God communicating with you in the ordinary events of life.
- Share what forms of prayer suit you best and bring you closer to God.
- What could you as a group do to provide others with a breathing space in your parish?
- Could you, would you, like to arrange an event where people could experience some silence. If so, what might this be and what is the next step?
- What do you find difficult about silence? What do you find helpful about it?
- Pass a lit candle round the group. Each person holds it for a short time and prays in silence for whatever they wish. Other members of the group pray for that person in silence.

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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

Hear 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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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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Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer and Spirituality

6. Choosing

Introduction

Following the Lord and keeping close to him in love was the theme of our last chapter. Anyone who takes following Christ seriously soon discovers that there are choices to be made; choices about how we are to grow in our relationship with God and choices about how God calls us to follow each and every day. Our spirituality helps us discern how to make those choices wisely.



Way-In

Here are some pictures which show people making a choice. Notice some of these show “big” choices and some appear to be less so. We make choices each day, some are relatively minor (what to wear, what to have for a meal this evening etc). Some choices can radically effect

our way of life. For instance deciding about how to react to someone who has hurt us deeply, should we hold a grudge and ignore them or to try and re-engage with them?

Reflect-&-Jot



Take time to think about some of the choices you have made in your own life. You might like to make a list of the big ones. Some you may wish to rejoice over in which case take a moment to thank God. Perhaps you regret some of them. If you do, resist the temptation to pass harsh judgement on yourself. Just quietly offer them to God. Record your conversation with the Lord in some way.

Inside-The-Text

Here is the final part of our chapter from St John's Gospel. Peter has been told by Jesus that he is to feed the sheep and to follow him. Here is what happens next.

Peter turned round and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about him?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!' (John 21:20-22)

So far the conversation between Peter and Jesus has been the intimate dialogue between the two of them. Now a third person, the one we call the beloved disciple, is indirectly involved. The conversation continues but that close back and forth dialogue seems to have taken a different turn.

Reflect-&-Jot



Read the Gospel passage again. Jot down what you make of it.

Digging-Deeper

Turning away and turning back The first thing we can note occurs in the first two words, "Peter turned". He turns round and sees someone other than Jesus. In so doing he knows Jesus is still there and the conversation is still going on but his attention shifts somewhere else and, as a result, he takes his eyes off the Lord. Just when he should be thinking about what it will mean to follow his Lord in the future he is asking a question about the future of someone else! Of course, we may be doing Peter a disservice and his question about the future of the other disciple may be one of genuine concern, but nevertheless keeping the focus on Christ is the principle foundation of our spirituality.

Discerning the will of God The future for this beloved disciple does seem to worry Peter. Perhaps it is a normal human reaction to want to know or to worry about someone else's fate, especially as Peter has just heard about his own. But Jesus turns the attention away from this and back to the task in hand. He talks about his will. ("If it is my will that he remain until I come what is that to you. Follow me.") Peter is to concentrate on following God's will in his own life, not on that of another. One of the most important elements of spirituality is how it enables us to discern what God's will is for ourselves.

Reflect-&-Jot

Think about a time when you have turned away from God and then turned back. What difference has that experience made to you since?

- If you are a visual sort of person choose a colour which expresses turning away and one which expresses turning back.
- Find some photographs or write a paragraph or two which express where and when you have discovered God at work in your life (God's will for you) in the past.

Making good choices

- Keep it simple. At the root of our spirituality we try to keep before us the desire to live a life in the footsteps of Christ and that lies at the heart of all our choices. So we can ask ourselves "If I choose this path will it lead me closer to Christ or not?"
- Look at the choices others have made. We can consider what choices people in the past have made, especially if they have been in a similar situation to our own. Sometimes we will find the experience of such people recorded in the pages of our Scriptures and sometimes in the lives of the saints. So we can ask ourselves "What light does their experience shed on my own? Do they offer me clues about what direction to take or what option to choose?"
- Choices are made within a context not in the abstract. Usually there are many different factors which come into play. Collect all the necessary information and take a hard headed look at concrete demands of the present situation. So we can ask ourselves "What are the demands of the current situation, the people and the context I am in?"
- We can think about the effects on those around us. We have to take into account our responsibilities and commitments to others. They have to be part of the reckoning too. God wants us to use our common sense as well as our faith. So we can ask ourselves, "How will the choice affect those around me?" What are the pros and cons of the choice before us?
- We can look at what is going on within ourselves. Listening to our own inner voice is important. Perhaps we feel unease about what might be the outcome of a possible course of action. If so, the task then is to see if that discomfort is coming because we are being challenged to change or because we think the change would lead us down the wrong road and away from the path of following Christ. So we can ask ourselves "Will this choice free me in my inner self or enslave me?"
- We need to recognise our blind spots. We can all make mistakes so we do well to look at our previous experience. We all carry baggage from the past and sometimes experience shows us what is or what isn't the right path to choose. So we can ask, "What are my strengths and what are my weaknesses?"
- Share with a trusted person. This enables us to test out our thoughts and responses. So we can ask "Who might I talk to about the choices I make?"
- Imagine. What advice would you give to someone else who was in the same position as you?

Reflect-&-Jot

Think of a choice you made recently. It doesn't have to be a very "big" choice but something of importance to you. Using the criteria above note down how you now feel about the choice you made?

Putting-It-All-Together

Catholic spirituality says:

- Turning away is possible but so is turning back. We are called to conversion over and over again.
- Making choices is part of our spiritual life because the choices we make help us conform (or not conform) to the fullness of life God wants for us and others. This is God's will for us.
- We have a rich treasury to draw on to help us hear how God is calling us to discern the right path.
- Discerning God's will requires an attitude of surrender to the God who always wills our good.
- The Holy Spirit is within us and prays within us especially when we don't know how to express in words what is deep within us.

Pray-A-Psalm

Psalm 23 (The Lord is my Shepherd) is such a familiar psalm to many of us that we can easily gloss over it. It is used so often at weddings and funerals that our ears can become dulled to the message of openness which it conveys. It eloquently shows the psalmist's relationship with the Lord to be one of intimate surrender to, and trust in, the God of Israel. We can make that prayer our own. Spend some time getting settled and ready. Read the psalm right through slowly. Then read each section stopping after each one to reflect on what the words mean in your relationship with God.

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.*

*Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.*

*Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my drooping spirit.
He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.*

*If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.*

*You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort.*

*You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.*

*My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing.*

*Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.*

*In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever.*

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Do You Love Me?

A Practical Guide to Catholic Prayer and Spirituality

Handouts

Introduction

Do you love me is 'a practical guide to Catholic Prayer & Spirituality' by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. It is published by Catholic Truth Society [<http://www.ctsbooks.org>].

This is a series of handouts based on *Do you love me?* It is intended for small groups who wish to work through the book. Each of the handouts is based on a chapter:

1. Searching
2. Recognising
3. Experiencing
4. Conversing
5. Following
6. Choosing

The content of the handout follows the structure of each chapter but shortens it so that the contents can be covered in a session lasting about 90 minutes. The handouts are intended as an introduction and it is hoped that participants would also have copies of *Do you love me?*

The format is flexible and the person leading the group will need to consider:

- Which passages to read out loud by a single voice (e.g. the Scripture), where varied voices might be helpful (e.g. the ideas in 'Putting it together') and which parts to invite people to read together silently.
- Reflect & Jot – to allow time for people to write down their thoughts. When it will be appropriate and helpful to invite people to share their reflections with the group.
- Time might also be given for people's thoughts and reflections about how the previous session has affected them in the intervening time.
- At the end of each chapter there is a psalm which may be used as part of a closing prayer.

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The Spirituality Committee is grateful to CTS for generously sharing some of the images used in the published text in these resources.



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