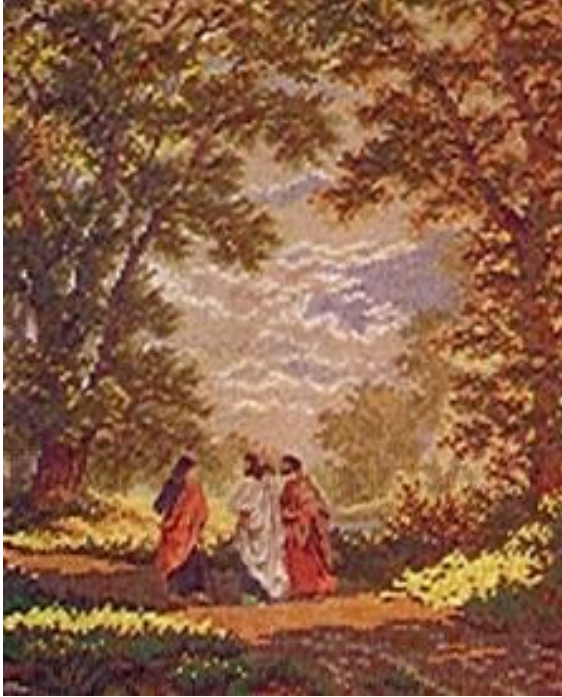


What Does It Mean?



To Know and Follow Christ?

“On whom can I rely? To whom shall I entrust myself? Where is the One who can offer me the response capable of satisfying my heart’s deepest desires?” Pope Benedict XVI, World Youth Day, Cologne, 2005.

Compiled by Fr. Martin Pitstick, 11/11/2010.

Jesus, Do I Know you?

How would we answer this question? Before answering too quickly, stop and think about this: many times we know a lot about Jesus, but do we really know Him?

To really know Jesus Christ, one has to open their heart to Him; one has to allow Him to enter deeply into their life. Think about human friendship; the more deeply we allow someone to enter into our life the more intimate the friendship becomes. This knowledge of our friend then becomes much more than just a collection of random facts – it becomes a path to a much deeper relationship. In order for this to happen, though, we have to take time to be with that person.

The same is true with Jesus. If we want to develop and deepen our relationship with Him, we must take the time and effort to open our hearts to Him. Otherwise, we run the risk of knowing about Him but never really knowing Him. Prayer is the way we develop and deepen that heart-to-Heart connection with Jesus. A life of prayer is the only way to truly come to know Jesus.



Jesus breaking bread with two disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

On the Road to Emmaus

They urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.

With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. (Luke 28:29-31)

Jesus longs to be with us! He is passionately in love with us! Look at the crucifix – “greater love than this no man has that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus understands our sufferings, our feelings of frustration, and the times when we are abandoned. He knows that we fall through sin – and yet, He never stops being passionately in love with us! He wants us to long for Him.

Our Lord has already fallen in love with us – what greater treasure could we ever hope to find than His infinite love? A life of prayer will allow us to capture and be captured by that Love, who is God.

May we all come to experience that intimate relationship Jesus greatly desires for each one of us, so that we may truly know Jesus Christ!

“The happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist. Only he gives the fullness of life to humanity!” Pope Benedict XVI

What Does It Mean to Follow Jesus?

Many people call themselves *Christian*, or "A Good Catholic," even though they may never have committed their whole lives to Christ. By this they mean that they generally believe in God, are basically good people, are for the most part, considerate of others and try not to intentionally hurt anyone. They may go to Church every Sunday and generally try to live by what they consider to be "Christian principles." They have committed *parts* of their lives to following Christ, but have never come to the point of **giving their**

whole lives to Christ. Christ has a place in their lives, perhaps an important place, but not the *central* place.

However Pope John Paul II spoke of a "total adherence to Jesus Christ" where we commit our "whole lives to Jesus" as the *initial phase* of conversion to the Christian Life.¹ This *initial phase of conversion* is when, in response to the Gospel, "a person is one day overwhelmed and brought to the decision to entrust himself to Jesus Christ by faith." (CT, 25) Some grow into this faith gradually. Many never do.

John Paul II says that for many Catholics today, this "initial evangelization has often not taken place." (CT, 19)

"A certain number of children baptized in infancy come for catechesis in the parish without receiving any other initiation into the faith and still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ; they only have the capacity to believe placed within them by baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit; and opposition is quickly created by the prejudices of ... non-Christian (surroundings)." (CT, 19)

We might ask ourselves if our homes provide an environment that supports and fosters faith. Have we ever made a conscious decision to wholeheartedly live our faith? Do we long to be close to God?

"Many... who have been baptized and been given a systematic catechesis and the sacraments still remain hesitant for a long time about committing their whole lives to Jesus Christ, even though they do not actually try to avoid religious instruction... Adults are not safe from temptations to doubt or to abandon their faith, especially as a result of their unbelieving surroundings." (CT, 19)

Are you still perhaps on the "Threshold of Faith"?

Pope John Paul II explained that: "being a Christian means saying, "yes" to Jesus Christ." "This "Yes" has two levels: it consists in surrendering to the word of God and relying on it, but it also means, at a later stage, endeavoring to know better and better the profound meaning of this word." (CT, 20)

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortatio: Catechesi Tradendae, On Catechesis in Our Time*, par. 19 (Abbreviated "CT" from here on).

Being a follower of Jesus Christ means:

- 1) "(Accepting) by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and... (giving) him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart;"
- 2) "To know better this Jesus to whom one has entrusted himself: to know his 'mystery.'" (CT, 20)

The problem is that many of us have never explicitly taken this first step of surrendering our lives to God. Or, we have allowed our faith to grow lukewarm. We want to say that we follow Jesus, yet hesitate to give ourselves completely to him. We want to call him Lord of the universe, but not Lord of *every* area of our lives. In order to experience the true fruit of Christian life, we must commit and entrust our *entire* life to Christ. We must surrender to the Word of God! Until we fully say "Yes" to Christ, we will not know the joy of complete surrender – the sacraments will remain dry and meaningless.

Faith brings us into the *family* of faith – God's family here on earth: "No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother" (St. Cyprian, as quoted in the Catechism).

If we find that our faith has no great meaning in our lives, then perhaps we should examine if we have entrusted our whole self to Christ and if we are living in a *state of grace*. This *decision* to center our lives in Christ is the beginning or "threshold" of faith. We should not expect a faith that is only *half planted*, or *partially nourished*, to bear much fruit. When Catholics renew baptismal vows at the Easter Vigil, it is meant to reaffirm a heartfelt, *total* commitment to Christ. We renew our baptismal commitment because we so easily fall away from it. Our commitment to Christ should be renewed daily. Let your "Yes" be that of Mary, and Christ will grow within you!

If you have never clearly surrendered your whole life to Christ in the way that Pope John Paul II has described, why not take a moment right now to give your whole heart to Jesus? Tell him you love him, are sorry for your sins, and that you now place him first in your life. Place all your trust in Christ and you will not be disappointed! Catholics, who have not been living in a *state of grace*, have the wonderful opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Confession, which reconciles us to God and the Church and restores the life of grace in our hearts. *Grace* gives meaning and strength to our faith.

Open Wide Your Heart to God!

Pope Benedict XVI speaking at World Youth day in Cologne, in 2005, invited the youth to open their hearts completely to God:

"Open wide your hearts to God! Let yourselves be surprised by Christ! ... Open the doors of your freedom to his merciful love! Share your joys and pains with Christ, and let him enlighten your minds with his light and touch your hearts with his grace."



No matter what our situation, Jesus wants to come into our hearts in a deeper way. He wants to share with us his love and forgiveness. He wants to heal us and make us whole - to give us new hope.

*"O my soul, created to enjoy such exquisite gifts,
what are you doing, where is your life going?
How wretched is the blindness
of Adam's children,
if indeed we are blind to such a brilliant light
and deaf to so insistent a voice."*

Saint John of the Cross
A Spiritual Canticle

The tragic reality of our world however, is that many don't take the time to think about God or to respond to his saving gift of love to us.

Will Many Be Saved?

"And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us.' He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!' There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out." Luke 13:23-28

Conversation of the Merciful God with a Despairing Soul

[An Excerpt from Saint Faustina's Diary]

Jesus: O soul steeped in darkness, do not despair. All is not yet lost. Come and confide in your God, who is love and mercy.

But the soul, deaf even to this appeal, wraps itself in darkness.

Jesus: My child, listen to the voice of your merciful Father.

In the soul arises this reply: "For me there is no mercy," and it falls into greater darkness, a despair which is a foretaste of hell and makes it unable to draw near to God.

Jesus calls to the soul a third time, but the soul remains deaf and blind, hardened and despairing. Then the mercy of God begins to exert itself, and, without any co-operation from the soul, God grants it final grace. If this too is spurned, God will leave the soul in this self-chosen disposition for eternity. This grace emerges from the merciful Heart of Jesus and gives the soul a special light by means of which the soul begins to understand God's effort; but conversion depends on its own will. The soul knows that this, for her, is final grace and, should it show even a flicker of good will, the mercy of God will accomplish the rest: My omnipotent mercy is active here. Happy the soul that takes advantage of this grace.

Jesus: What joy fills My Heart when you return to me. Because you are weak, I take you in My arms and carry you to the home of My Father.

Soul (as if awaking, asks fearfully): Is it possible that there yet is mercy for me?

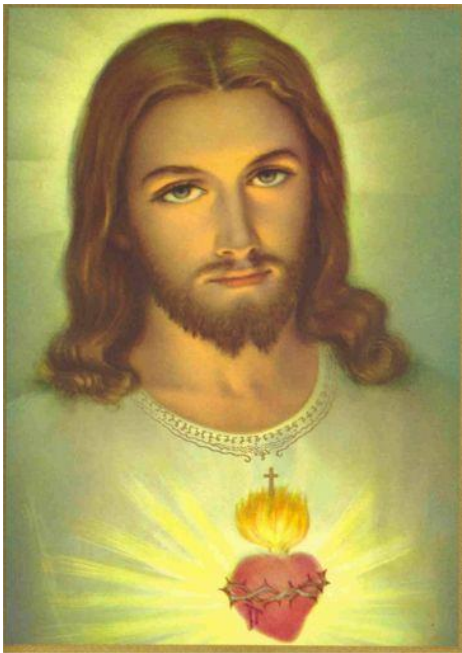
Jesus: There is, My child. You have a special claim on My mercy. Let it act in your poor soul; let the rays of grace enter your soul; they bring with them light, warmth, and life.

Soul: But fear fills me at the thought of my sins, and this terrible fear moves me to doubt Your goodness.

Jesus: My child, all your *sins* have not wounded My Heart as painfully as your present lack of trust does— that after so many efforts of My love and mercy, you should still doubt My goodness.

Soul: O Lord, save me yourself, for I perish. Be my Savior. O Lord, I am unable to say anything more; my pitiful heart is torn asunder; but You, O Lord...

Jesus does not let the soul finish but, raising it from the ground, from the depths of its misery, he leads it into the recesses of His Heart where all its sins disappear instantly, consumed by the flames of love.



Jesus: Here, soul, are all the treasures of My Heart. Take everything you need from it.

*Jesus, I place all my trust
in You!*

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