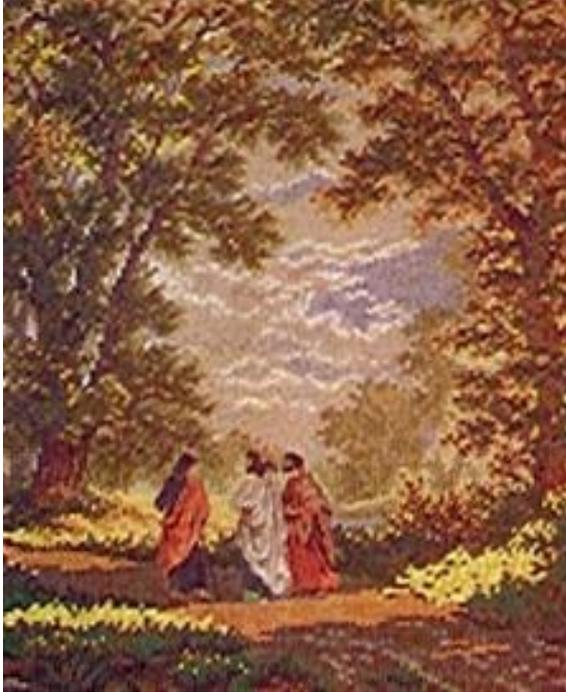


What Does It Mean?



To Know and Follow Christ?

To Have Faith?

To Lose Faith?

“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.

What Is Faith? Quotes taken from the *Catechism of the*

Catholic Church (found online at: <http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>)

Faith is necessary for salvation

“Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation. (Cf. *Mk* 16:16; *Jn.* 3:36; 6:40) ‘Since “without faith it is impossible to please [God]” and to attain to the fellowship of his sons, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life “But he who endures to the end.”’ (*Dei Filius* 3:DS 3012; cf. *Mt* 10:22; 24:13 and *Heb.* 11:6; Council of Trent:DS 1532" CCC 161

“Faith is necessary for salvation. The Lord himself affirms: ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’ (*Mk* 16:16).” CCC 183

Faith is both a gift of God and a human act (in response to God)

“In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace: ‘Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace’ (St. Thomas Aquinas).” CCC 155

The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. CCC 2088

Faith commits our whole selves (mind, heart and will) to God

“Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God... it is a *free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth ... it is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says.” CCC 150

“Faith is a personal adherence of the whole man to God who reveals himself. It involves an assent of the intellect and will to the self-revelation God has made through his deeds and words.” CCC 176

“Faith in God leads us to turn to him alone as our first origin and our ultimate goal, and neither to prefer anything to him nor to substitute anything for him.” CCC 229

Faith is our response to a loving God

God reveals his saving love to mankind, inviting us to participate in the very life and love of God that is found in the Trinity.

“The adequate response to this invitation is faith.”

“*By faith*, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. (Cf. *DV* 5) With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, ‘the obedience of faith’ (reference Rom 1:5; 16:26).“ CCC 143

A loving response to God means we nourish & protect our faith

“The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it.” CCC 2088

“Faith in God’s love encompasses the call and the obligation to respond with sincere love to divine charity. The first commandment enjoins us to love God above everything and all creatures for him and because of him.” CCC 2093

Our belief in God must be *complete* (we don’t pick and choose)

“Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith ‘man freely commits his entire self to God.’ (*DV* 5) For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God’s will. ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ Living faith ‘work[s] through charity.’ (*Rom* 1:17; *Gal* 5:6)” CCC 1814

Our faith in God is safeguarded and passed down through the Church Christ established

“The Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it. When the Church celebrates the sacraments, she confesses the faith received from the apostles.” CCC 1124

“The Church, ‘the pillar and bulwark of the truth’ (*1Tim* 3:15), faithfully guards ‘the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints’ (*Jude* 3). She guards the memory of Christ’s words; it is she who from generation to generation hands on the apostles’ confession of faith. As a mother who teaches her children to speak and so to understand and communicate, the Church our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and the life of faith.” CCC 171

The family has the primary responsibility for the faith of children

“*Education in the faith* by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.” CCC 2226

Mary is the model of Faith; her “Yes” brought Jesus to the world

“Only faith can embrace the mysterious ways of God’s almighty power. This faith glories in its weaknesses in order to draw to itself Christ’s power (See: *2 Cor* 12:9; *Phil* 4:13). The Virgin Mary is the supreme model of this faith, for she believed that ‘nothing will be impossible with God,’ and was able to magnify the Lord: ‘For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.’ (*Lk* 1:37, 49)” CCC 273

Can Non Christians be saved?

“Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity.” CCC 1260

Perseverance in faith in trial, temptation, and spiritual dryness

“Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: ‘Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting

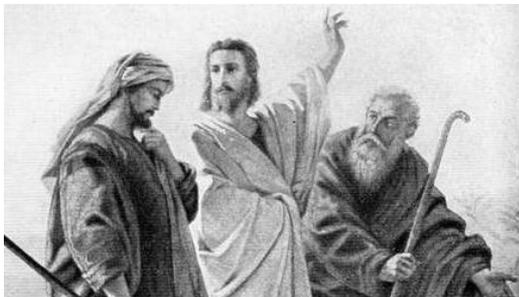
conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith.’ (*1 Tim* 1:18-19) To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith; (Cf. *Mk* 9:24; *Lk* 17:5; 22:32) it must be ‘working through charity,’ abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church (*Gal* 5:6; *Rom* 15:13; cf. *Jas* 2:14-26).” CCC 162

Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Those on rocky ground are the ones who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe only for a time and fall away in time of trial. Luke 8: 6,13

Another difficulty, especially for those who sincerely want to pray, is *dryness*. Dryness belongs to contemplative prayer when the heart is separated from God, with no taste for thoughts, memories, and feelings, even spiritual ones. This is the moment of sheer faith clinging faithfully to Jesus in his agony and in his tomb. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." If dryness is due to the lack of roots, because the word has fallen on rocky soil, the battle requires conversion (see Luke 8: 6,13). CCC 2731

Can We Lose Our Faith?

The following is an excerpt from *Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), Peter J. Kreeft, 29-31 (Bold emphasis added).



“Losing your faith”

No one “loses” his faith, as he loses his watch. Faith is never lost against our will, any more than it is chosen against our will. We choose to believe, and we choose not to believe.

Some of the main causes for the choice not to believe are the following (see CCC 29):

[*Catholic Christianity* excerpt continues on next 2 pages]

Challenges to Faith [Faith's Answers found on opposite page]

1. **Revolt** against evil in the world and against the God who does not act as we think he should to defeat evil as quickly as we would wish;
2. **Ignorance** or misunderstanding of the faith;
3. **Indifference** or laziness;
4. The **cares of the world**, “having no time for religion” (that is, *making* no time for God);
5. **Greed** for riches and the things money can buy, serving “the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25);
6. The **scandal** of bad example on the part of believers;
7. The **unfashionableness** of religion in a secular society;
8. The **refusal to repent** and give up some cherished sin;
9. **Fear of the unknown**, fear of letting go and giving God a “blank check”; fear of trusting him;
10. **Fear of suffering** rejection or reprisals from family, friends, or secular authorities;
11. **Pride**, the demand to “play God”, to be in control, to have our own way;
12. The **difficulty in trusting** God as Father if we have experienced broken families and absent or unloving human fathers.

But all these “reasons” not to believe can be answered.

Faith's Answers [slightly abbreviated from original text]

1. Faith's one-word answer to the problem of evil is: Wait. God will conquer all evil, in time, in the end. But we have to go through the middle of the story to get to the end.
2. A (good) book or the *Catechism* or a wise and good priest can usually clear up misunderstandings.
3. If we knew God as his closest friends, the saints, do, we could never be bored or indifferent to him. If we are bored with Catholic theology, morality, or liturgy... we do not realize that they are the truth about God, the good will of God, and the celebration of the presence of God.
4. If it is foolish to refuse to give up ten dollars to win a million, it is even more foolish to refuse to give up a little time to win eternity.
5. Everything we seek, desire, love, and enjoy in this world, the things we hope money can buy – pleasure, beauty, freedom, power, peace, excitement, happiness – is to be found in God, multiplied to infinity. As St. Augustine says, “Seek what you seek, but it is not where you seek it.”
6. Do we refuse to love because there are some bad lovers? Do we refuse to marry because there are some bad husbands and wives?
7. If you must choose between the two, which is better: to be accepted by God forever and be rejected by some men for a little time, or to be accepted by some men for a little time but rejected by God forever?
8. We are all sinners, sin addicts, sinaholics. We all find it hard to give up cherished sins, even after we believe. But the question is not whether we can, but whether we will, whether we are willing to let God do it in us. We cannot, but he can and will if we let him. And all who have say the same thing: it is joyful liberation, like being freed from a drug habit.
9. Being born, falling in love, marrying, or traveling to a new place are all experiences of the unknown. The greatest joys come from letting go.
10. Jesus promised us: “Every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29).
11. Pride was the first sin, the sin of Satan, who resented being Number Two to God. He would not obey God's will, only his own. (“Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven” – Milton.) This is also a selfish, spoiled baby's philosophy of life: “I want what I want when I want it.”
12. Where there is no faith and trust there can be no joy. We do not know whether our trust will be disappointed again, by God, as it was by man. But we do know that our only hope, our only chance at joy, on earth and in heaven forever, is to trust and to love. If our trust is betrayed by men, that is all the more reason to trust God. It is not reasonable to refuse the only lifeboat that can save us when all the other boats have sunk.

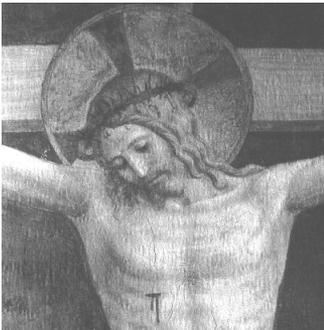
Faith and Christ

[*Catholic Christianity* excerpt continued]

The Catholic faith has one answer, ultimately, to all twelve of these problems; in fact, one answer to all problems: Jesus Christ, the one answer God provided. “God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19)

Every Catholic home and every Catholic believer should have a crucifix. For the answer to all doubts, temptations, and trials is there (in the reality it pictures, not just in the picture of it). For instance, the problem of suffering and injustice. God’s answer is not an explanation but a deed: he did not hover above it like a bird, but came down and shared it as a man, as a victim. Instead of telling us why not to weep, he wept with us (Jn 11:12). Christ is God’s tears. And Christ is the conqueror of tears – and of death.

[end of *Catholic Christianity* excerpt]



“Commit yourselves without reserve to serving Christ, whatever the cost. The encounter with Jesus Christ will allow you to experience in your hearts the joy of his living and life-giving presence, and enable you to bear witness to it before others.”

Pope Benedict XVI,
World Youth Day, Cologne, 2005

“If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation” (Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, April 24, 2005).

Faith, however, must be lived out – for, “what good is it... if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” (James 2:14) True faith is accompanied by the “labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1Thes. 1:3) Faith is nourished by the liturgical life of the Church, by daily prayer and reading of God’s Word. It is expressed in charity, in the context of a moral life that draws its hope from Christ.

The Necessary Minimum of Catholic Life

[From the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2041-2043]

The precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbor:

The first precept ("You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor") requires the faithful to sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord as well as the principal liturgical feasts honoring the mysteries of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints; in the first place, by participating in the Eucharistic celebration, in which the Christian community is gathered, and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days.

The second precept ("You shall confess your sins at least once a year") ensures preparation for the Eucharist by the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, which continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness.

The third precept ("You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season") guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord's Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy.

The fourth precept ("You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church") ensures the times of asceticism (self denial) and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart.

The fifth precept ("You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church") means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.

The Church in this world is the sacrament of salvation, the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and men. CCC 780
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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?

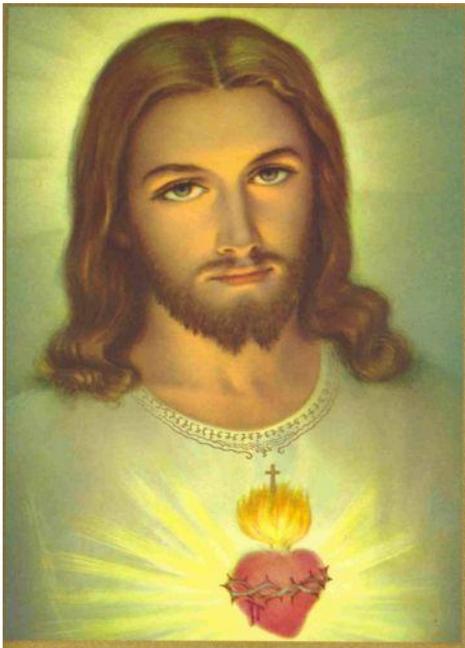
Jesus: There is, My child. You have a special claim on My mercy. Let it act in your poor soul; let the rays of grace enter your soul; they bring with them light, warmth, and life.

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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