

**A GUIDE TO FORMING
A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS
A Four Week Journey**

Father James Chelich – January 2020

The essential foundation of a Catholic's Faith is the establishment of a strong personal relationship with our Savior. The Jesus we believe is more than just a historical figure, and more than just a remote presence that lives somewhere far off "in heaven." The Jesus we believe in is risen and dwells among us. Jesus is present to us and he calls for a personal response from us.

Think about relationships for a moment. Our relationship with someone is established by contact and strengthened by the frequency and way in which we interact with them. The people we interact with the most are those who most influence and often determine our own attitudes, words and actions. If we are consistent in our interaction with someone, we "take on" their attitude and patterns of behaving. These are simple rules apply to all personal interaction.

There are the Four Exercises that Build and Sustain a Personal Relationship with Jesus:

1. Getting to Know Jesus and Listening to Him
2. Walking and Talking to Jesus
3. Drawing Strength from Jesus to Love the Right Way
4. Looking in the Mirror with Jesus

**I
GETTING TO KNOW JESUS
AND LISTENING TO HIM**

When you grow a relationship with a person you are curious to know about them. You want to know where they are from and about the things they have done. You want to know what they have to say, how they see the world and how they feel about things. For just a moment, set aside what you think or have heard about Jesus. Ask yourself: How much of what Jesus actually said do I know? How accurately can you describe Jesus' feelings? The priest's job is not "to know this for you." Your priest "speaks" to your personal knowledge of Jesus. So, how do you go about "knowing Jesus?" It's not difficult and quite simple.

Getting to Know Jesus and Listening to Him requires that you set aside a time devoted to Him. The good news is that it requires no more than ten minutes a day. During this time you read a small portion of the Gospel. If you are just getting started, I encourage you to read the Gospel of Mark, beginning with chapter one, verse one. The Bible is conveniently divided into short passages with bold headings, each describing one moment or event in the life of Jesus. The next day read the short passage next in order. In this way you will accompany Jesus through the entire Gospel. After reading the passage, pause in reflection by asking a couple of questions:

- What was Jesus thinking or feeling?
- What did I learn about Jesus from reading this?
- What did Jesus do or say that showed me something about the world or how I should live?

Finish by forming a small prayer spoken silently in your heart to Jesus, based upon what you read about him. For example, “Jesus, help me to show a little more compassion.” or “Jesus, I really need your patience.”

II WALKING AND TALKING TO JESUS

This takes place throughout your day. It requires that you simply pause often during the day for a few seconds of deliberate attention. This can be done as you move from one task to another or at times you naturally pause in the course of your day. In these few seconds you make conscious contact with Jesus by silently saying this simple prayer:

**“Jesus, be with me.
Help me to see the good I can do
and give me the strength to do it.”**

You should pray this knowing that the good Jesus helps you see may not always be what you want to do or say. But that’s the point, isn’t it? Are you acting in relationship with him or are you acting on your own? Another way of saying this is: Are you acting in communion with Jesus or are you acting alone? There is a big difference between the two, which you will quickly come to see. It was Jesus who personally asked you to do this. He says to you:

*Come to my all you who are weary
and find life burdensome, and I shall refresh you.
Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me.
Matthew 11:29*

This is what “yoking” yourself to Jesus means. It is something you have to take the initiative to do personally, but he is always present and ready to respond. This is living “in communion” with Jesus. You might want to memorize this Bible verse as a treasured, personal invitation from your Savior. As Catholics we should know this. We give a lot of attention to Jesus words about Holy Communion in John’s Gospel. We take him seriously when he says:

*I am the vine, you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear
much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.
John 15:5*

III DRAWING STRENGTH FROM JESUS TO LOVE THE RIGHT WAY

This focuses on your celebration of the Mass, particularly after your hear Jesus say the words:

“This is my body which will be given up for you...”

*“This is the chalice of my blood
which will be poured out for you...”*

It is important to be intentionally present to Jesus and to what he is saying to you during this moment. Jesus died for you. At this sacred moment Jesus is offering his life to live in you.

Explicitly ask for His strength to pass into you. Pray a short but heart-felt mental prayer in these or similar words: “Jesus I need your strength to love others in way you love me.”

Striving to love the right way, by dying to self to give life to others, overcomes self absorption and patterns of self-centeredness. This happens in communion with Jesus as you give your life for the life of others in small and large ways.

Resolutions and promises won’t work. Only a decision to grasp firmly a strength other than your own. Jesus’ way of loving is the only path to peace of mind, the only way to finding meaning and purpose in your life, and the only way to achieve the personal fulfillment that endures unto eternal life. The heart of your personal relationship with Jesus is your awareness of Him loving through you. You actually are a living member of the Body of Christ. These ancient words were spoken of BOTH Jesus and you:

*I have called you for the victory of justice.
I have grasped you by the hand.
I formed you, and set you as...a light to the nations.
Isaiah 42:6*

Jesus is your strength!

IV LOOKING IN THE MIRROR WITH JESUS

This should take place once a week at the end of your Devotion Time. You ask Jesus to look with you into the mirror of your conscience: to think about your attitude and behavior, to identify where you need to change. Your model, mentor and coach is Jesus, and he is standing at your side.

In any strong personal relationship two people form a bond of accountability with one another. They hold each other accountable to be true to their best self. The whole reason for establishing a personal relationship with Jesus is because we catch sight of our “best self” in Jesus. Getting to know Jesus, walking and talking with him, drawing strength from him we see more and more clearly in him the kind of human being we were created to be. Saint Paul tells us,

Those (God) foreknew God also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that (Jesus) might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Romans 8:29

This is why God became flesh in Jesus. We had completely lost sight of who we were created to be. The Bible says, “*In his light we see the light.*” *Psalms 36:9* Looking in the mirror with Jesus at your side you see both him and yourself, and you see the contrast between you. With Jesus you set specific goals for change. The next morning you stand in front of the mirror in your bedroom or bathroom and say quietly: “Jesus, our goal today is: (e.g. to change how I talk to people).” Repeat this for a few days. An unexamined life is a life that experiences no personal growth. You are not facing yourself alone. You are facing yourself with your Savior at your side. His question never is, “What are you going to do about this?” It is always, “What are we going to do about this?...Let’s get going!” This spiritual exercise disposes you to be open to the use and the power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). It orients you to its reception.