

My Brothers and Sisters,

The theme of today's readings is prayer. One of Pope Francis' constant themes is the importance of a personal encounter with Jesus. Because prayer is our intimate communication with God, prayer is one of the primary ways we encounter Jesus. Just this week, Pope Francis said that without prayer, faith dies.

We all know how important quality communication is in establishing, maintaining, and developing relationships with others. One of the principal causes of marital breakup is lack or loss of communication. Conversely, we all know how excited we are to spend quality time and communicate with the people we love and who love us.

Couples, especially couples with children, often say how difficult it is to find time for intimate conversation with each other. If we are going to have intimate conversation with Jesus, we have to make time and space for that conversation. One of the best ways to do that is to set aside some quiet time, some alone time, every day.

If we want to encounter Jesus, we need to converse with Jesus. We need to feel able to talk to Jesus about anything and everything in our lives, the way we would talk to those with whom we are closest. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that although he is the Son of God, Jesus is also fully human, like us in all things but sin. The author of Hebrews wrote, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*" [4:15]. Also, we need to remember that as Son of God he already knows all the secrets of our hearts.

One-sided communication, however, is not true communication. Communication requires a dialogue, not a monologue. Sometimes we may be good at talking to Jesus, but we may not be so good at listening to Jesus. The problem, of course, is that Jesus does not speak to us as we speak to each other. In today's reading from Paul to Timothy, Paul wrote, "*All scripture is inspired by God.... from infancy you have known (the) sacred scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*"

When we say Scripture is inspired, we are saying that the Bible is the Word of God. However, it is not primarily the Word about God but God himself speaking to us. The Bible is the living Word of God. Therefore, if we want to know Jesus, there is no better way than through the Gospels. If we want Jesus to speak to us, there is no better way than through the Gospels.

Another way Jesus speaks to us is in silence, in quiet. Sometimes when we pray, we do all the talking and never stop to listen. After we talk, we need to spend some time in quiet listening. At other times, Jesus speaks to us through others. Of course, as Catholic Christians, we believe that the Eucharist is our privileged encounter with Christ. Christ is never more present to us than in the gift of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

My brothers and sisters, today's Gospel ends with a sobering question from Jesus, "*But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*" Today's reading from Paul to Timothy suggests that Jesus is not simply referring to belief but fidelity. Paul challenges us, "*Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed.*" In other words, we are not only called to believe in Jesus, but we are also called to live our relationship with Jesus. The First Letter of John suggests what this might mean: "*The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives*" for one another [3:16].