

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.

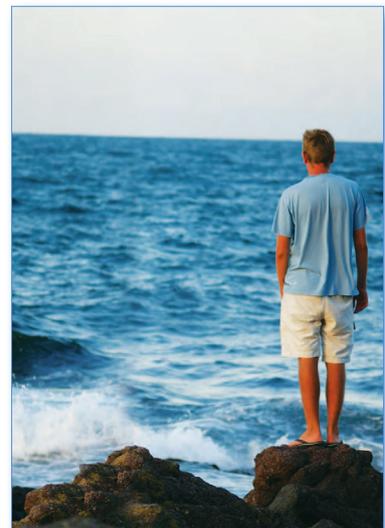
Way In

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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