

An Encounter with Christ

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The announcement by the doctor was devastating. the diagnosis: terminal cancer. The prognosis: fatal...only a liver transplant would save his life, but at his age and in his weakened condition, survival was more than doubtful.

My friend...let's call him "Nino"...was raised a devout catholic in Sicily before moving here about 20 years ago, and describes himself as being a practicing Catholic all of his life. So, faced with this medical crisis, he began to "pray" in the way to which he was accustomed for the Lord to help him ...the "Our Father", a "Hail Mary", and a "Glory Be". Suddenly...perhaps out of desperation, but he says he felt more prompted than desperate...my friend, Nino, began to "talk" to Jesus...to converse with him like an advisor...a beloved brother...a trusted friend.

That night in the hospital, Nino encountered the risen Christ as he'd never done before. He sensed peace...and even joy. He

discovered a new, closer relationship with this savior Who to him had always before been a figure of history...a corporal on a cross. Jesus became relevant and for the first time, real, in Nino's life. In my friend's words: "...and I've never been the same since".

Nino died once during the transplant (was revived) and once again during recovery (and again revived)...but he held onto the new hope and assurance he'd found in his friend, Jesus. I'm happy to report that Nino is quite well today, closer than ever to his savior, spending quality time "talking with", as well as "praying to", his Lord and Savior. He says he is a "new catholic" now, with a renewed faith, a renewed attitude, and a renewed perspective. Nino had an encounter with Christ that gave him a new, and still growing, relationship with the risen Lord.

If we take a quick look at the Feast of The Presentation of the Lord, we see what is called in the Greek, the "meeting" and in the Byzantine tradition, the "encounter". Jewish custom and Mosaic law demanded that the first born son be consecrated to God. Joseph and Mary faithfully discharged their Jewish duties in

presenting Jesus in the temple, during the time for purification, to dedicate Him to God through the temple prophet, Simeon, and to offer sacrifice. In his encounter with Jesus, Simeon declared Him to be the Glory of Israel and the light for revelation to the Gentiles.

We hear sung in the assigned Psalm for that feast: “Who is the king of glory? It is the Lord of hosts!”

Christ, the light of the world, reflects another popular title of today’s feast: “Candlemas”...indicative of the optional blessing of candles before mass and a special procession in some parishes.

I submit to you that my friend, Nino, came to a similar conclusion in his encounter with Christ that Simeon reached...they both saw Jesus as the light of the world, the savior of humankind, and it became personal for Nino who was looking for comfort in his crisis, and it became personal for Simeon who was looking for the promised Messiah before he passed away. In a way, Jesus was personal to both in a salvific and healing way. Neither Nino nor Simeon were ever the same...they were changed forever. Simeon was content to die knowing he had seen the promised Messiah. Nino

was renewed with a personal relationship with Jesus. Each man was destined to live out the rest of his life knowing who Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, really is. Nino speaks of walking and talking with Him, joking with Him, being His confidant, trusting Him, worshipping Him, praising Him, reveling in His glory. Nino has a true and very real relationship with Jesus that continues to grow each day.

To encounter Jesus in a lasting and loving way, we don't all have to have a Damascus road experience with Christ like Saint Paul, or a medical crisis like Nino. But all of us have had or will have the opportunity to give our fiat to the Lord as he knocks on the door of our heart. Some Catholics call it "conversion". Protestants call it "being born again"...but that's another story for later....

Saint Paul has a lot to say about the change that an encounter with the risen Lord will have on the life of one of his children. In Romans he says we are raised to newness of life in Christ [rom 6:4]; to the Ephesians he assures that we will be renewed in the spirit of our minds as we put on the new self [eph 4:23-24]; he warns the Judaizers

in Galatians that it's not circumcision or uncircumcision that matters, it's being a new creature in Christ [gal 6:15]; and in Corinthians Saint Paul exhorts us that "*Whoever is in Christ, is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.*" [2 Cor 5:17]

When studying what Saint John Paul II called the "new evangelization", I was struck with the additional emphasis he placed on "internal evangelization"...renewal within the person, as well as within the Catholic faith...that's in contrast to the missionary zeal he was promoting. Of many resulting new initiatives by Holy Mother Church, we can see a repeated theme of "growing relationships with Christ". This, I believe, is the message for us in today's Feast of the Presentation of the Lord...to begin to grow our personal relationship with Jesus.

A gentleman in a big hurry to get in and out of the store noticed a full parking lot as he entered from the street. He reverently said: "*Lord, please help me find a parking spot quickly*". Then just as he turned down the first parking lane, a lady was

backing out of her parking space, so he quickly added: *“Never mind, Lord, I got one!”*

Do we take the Lord for granted, even when he intervenes in our life? Are we too busy or too skeptical to ask Him for a simple parking space? Do we exclude Him from our life except on Sunday during mass? He loves each of us more than life itself...after all, He died for each one of us...and He longs for a personal relationship with each of us. Won't you try “chatting” with the Lord...walking with Him...joking with Him? Jesus desires to “sup” with us, to play with us, to struggle with us, to cry with us, to laugh with us, and to rejoice with us. He desires to be an integral part of our daily life.

As Catholics, we're so fortunate to have the Sacrament of the Eucharist...and what more personal relationship can the faithful have with their Savior than to consume Him body, blood, soul, and divinity? Shall we grow this personal relationship further? As you approach his table of plenty in the Eucharist, won't you put your head on His shoulder, look into His eyes, and say simply: *“I love*

you, Lord. I want you to spend more time with me and I want to spend more time with you”? **You’ll be much, much better for it....**

God bless you all....