

Following Jesus Today

Suggestions for Staying Close to Jesus

Excerpts from Chapters Eight and Nine:

David G. R. Keller.

Reconsidering Jesus of Nazareth: Looking beyond rejection and harmful experiences.

Tynoddfa Press: ISBN 978-0-578-66665-5

“In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

John 14:19-20

“Keep close to Jesus.”

The desert father Paul the Simple

In Chapter 8 we examined four patterns in Jesus’ life that provide a model for us as we discover and encounter Jesus’ presence in our lives today: quiet listening, faithful discernment, commitment to the scriptures and life of his Jewish religious community, and compassionate engagement with the life of the world. Here are similar patterns you and I can use to remain close to Jesus in our daily lives.

Quiet listening

What does quiet listening look like?

“In the morning, while it was still very dark,

he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.” (Mark 1:35) This was a

constant pattern in Jesus’ life and there is little doubt that he was influenced by his own Jewish tradition:

“O God, you are my God; at dawn I seek you; for you my soul is thirsting. For you my flesh is pining, like a weary land without water. I have come before you in the holy place, to behold your strength and your glory” (Psalm 63:2–3 Grail translation)

In our fast-paced culture it is not always convenient to make time for prayer at the beginning and end of each day. The world will come rushing in soon enough, especially if we turn on the TV or our smart phones right away. Your “holy place” is anywhere you choose to experience God’s presence.

The beginning of each day

Where is your holy place at the beginning of the day? How much time can you spend there? It is important to begin simply. Soon after waking and rising, let your body express a physical sense of gratefulness for the new day and your desire to be in God’s presence. Even if you know a specific day will be difficult, gratefulness and a prayer for God’s love and guidance will influence your relationships and tasks.

Quiet listening first thing in the morning can be a simple prayer, sitting in silence, or reflecting on a passage of scripture from the Bible or another religious tradition. Perhaps you already have a pattern for prayer in the morning from a prayer book or your own composition.

If this is something new for you, try this at the beginning of your day:

- Get out of bed and stretch, thanking God for the new day and the gift of life: “This is the day God has given me; I will rejoice and be glad in it.”
- In your “holy place” recite this prayer of verses from Psalm 63:

O God, you are my God; at dawn I seek you;
for you my soul is thirsting.
For you my flesh is pining,
like a dry, weary land without water.
I have come before you in the holy place,
to behold your strength and your glory.

Your faithful love is better than life;
my lips will speak your praise.
I will bless you all my life;
in your name I will lift up my hands.

My soul shall be filled as with a banquet;
with joyful lips, my mouth shall praise you.

- End with one of these short prayers:

Bind my head and my heart in you, Holy One,
and may I remain in your company this day.

Bless the Lord, my soul
and bless God's holy Name.
Bless the Lord, my soul,
who leads me into love.
Into your hands I commend my spirit.

The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the companionship of the Holy Spirit be
with me each moment of this day.

At the end of each day:

- Toward the end of your day, in the evening or at bedtime, recite this prayer from the Celtic
Christian tradition:

I offer to You, O God, the troubles of this day;
I lay down my burdens at your feet.
Forgive my sins;
Give me your peace, which I need not understand;
And help me receive your Word.

Into your hands I commend my family, my neighbors,
My brothers and sisters in Christ,
And every person I have met today.

The guarding of the God of life be on me,
The guarding of loving Christ be on me,
The guarding of sheltering Spirit be on me,
Every night of my life,
To aid and enfold me
Each day and night of my life.

Quiet listening does not always mean contemplative prayer in total silence and may take place at different times throughout your day. Eventually you will find it a natural and vital part of each day, regardless of the time. But whatever you decide, be sure to make it *a consistent pattern and discipline each day*. This will not be easy because our smart phones, email, Twitter, and Facebook keep us constantly accessible. There is nothing wrong with communication, conversation and entertainment. At the same time, it is possible to fill our lives with so many things that we empty life of its richness. In the midst of all the noise and distractions we may lose our ability to listen to each other and to life, itself. We don't need experts to help us. We need some quiet and time to listen.

Over the years – and it has not been easy – I have learned that quiet listening makes space in me to experience and be formed by God's presence. It opens the possibility for my desires, words, and behavior throughout each day to have their origin in God's presence. Another way of saying this is that quiet listening helps form me as a person of prayer whose life bears manifestations of the mystery of God.

Faithful discernment

You and I ask questions about life, consciously or unconsciously. “Where have I come from?”, “Who am I?”, “What should my life be like?”, and “Where is my life headed?” These recurring questions point toward our need to discern personal meaning and purpose for our lives as long as we live. What are we looking for?

I have a young friend who is at a transition in his life. Recently he spent four days alone in the woods without food on a vision quest. He was sent off by four friends after a ceremony around a camp fire. He experienced doubts and uncertainty that led him to depend on God's Spirit to guide him. He returned to the camp fire without answers, but with resolve to seek

opportunities and employment that were congruent with his personal values and his faith in God. His silent solitude and quiet listening, as hard as it was, helped him let go of control of his future and discern what is most important in his life and live according to those values.

My friend's vision quest was similar to Jesus' opportunity for faithful discernment following his baptism.

"Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus had also been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'" (Luke 3:21-22) "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. (Mt 4:1)

Jesus "was praying" at his baptism when the boundary between heaven and earth became transparent. He heard a voice declare that he was God's son and the presence of a dove testified to the intimacy of that relationship. Now he was being led to the desert to be tested and discern what that meant and how this intimate filial relationship with God could be tangible in his life. In the Hebrew scriptures "temptation" means a trial or opportunity to prove one's self, rather than a seduction to wrong doing.

Jesus' prayer in the water of the Jordan led to a time apart in the dry and infertile wilderness. It began with a long period of fasting. In Jesus' culture fasting was an act of self-humiliation called "*taanit*". (*"When I humbled my soul with fasting..."* Psalm 69:10) It was a form of prayerfully approaching God for God's assistance. This is a clear indication that Jesus realized he needed God's help. His prayer of fasting in the desert seems to have been a direct consequence of his prayer during his baptism. Jesus needed help to discern what "*You are my son*" meant and how that relationship would influence and empower his life and ministry. This

would be one of many opportunities in his life of prayer for faithful discernment. The gospel of Luke describes the consequence of Jesus' discernment in the desert: *"Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone."* (Luke 4:14–15)

Jesus' prayerful experience of his Abba's presence in the desert enabled him to link what he desired for his life and the lives of people around him with discernment of what God desires for human life. His discernment was "faithful" because he trusted his experience of God and was willing to follow where it led. His experiences in prayer became the womb of his words and actions in daily life. *"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works."* Jn 14:10

This kind of discernment involves risk and letting go of control of the outcome of our quiet listening. It is not "blind trust." *It is trust based on our experiences of God day after day, even when nothing seems to be "happening."* It will not come "out of the blue" and requires genuine desire and persistence. The richness of faithful discernment enables a person to see into what is taking place in society and his or her life and find courage to speak and act according to what God desires. Prayer and active involvement in societal issues are colleagues. Trusting God's presence in prayer enables us to trust that God's wisdom and power is present in every situation of our lives.

"The disciples gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'" (Mark 6:30–31)

Faithful discernment also requires patient waiting. This is currently counter-cultural. We live in a society of constant information and the desire for hurried, if not instant, results. But information is not knowledge or understanding and results are not always fruitful. Patient waiting makes space for us to listen to God and for the Spirit of God to mentor our thoughts and actions with God's desires for us and the world. Patient waiting opens the door leading to a different experience of time. Chronological time relates to the mind and body's need to find solutions and facilitates "progress," usually with some kind of deadline. Patient waiting helps us accept our limitations and weaknesses, provides persistence in our life of prayer, and develops reliance on God. Amma Syncletica, a fourth-century Christian ascetic in Egypt said, "Eyes see only light. Ears hear only sound, but a listening heart perceives meaning."

"Who am I?", "What should my life be like?", and "Where is my life headed?"

Responses to these questions are revealed in the contexts of ordinary, daily life as well as our times of quiet listening. When a person discerns God's presence in the intimacy of prayer, then God's presence can be recognized everywhere. Its hallmark is life-giving power. It is real whenever and wherever it is experienced. Experience of what is real – what is true – in God's presence will unmask what is not real. In our quiet listening Jesus calls us to discern what is real and entrust our lives to the One who is real. This is what Jesus meant when he said: "*You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free.*"

We have seen that following Jesus involves trust. Once that commitment is made we learn that Jesus places *his trust in us* to manifest God's life in our daily living. Quiet listening and faithful discernment in daily life lead toward compassionate action in the world around us.

Commitment to the scriptures and life of Jesus' Jewish religious community

In the previous chapter I discussed ways that each us can make a commitment to know and reflect on the Old and New Testaments and participate in the worship and community life of a Christian faith community.

Here are some resources for Bible study and simple methods for meditation on the Bible, especially the New Testament and the life of Jesus in the four gospels.

Study of and meditation on the Bible

Study of biblical content is important, but its purpose is not simply information. It is essential, also, to listen to biblical passages without personal agenda and a desired outcome. In this way we can be open to a dialogue with God's Spirit. As we discovered in quiet listening, if we learn to recognize God's voice and presence in the Bible and other sacred scripture we will learn to recognize God's presence and guidance in our daily activities, challenges and relationships. Listening to God in holy scripture – being present in mind, body and spirit – is prayer.

I have listed several books in the Select Bibliography that provide excellent and readable introductions to the Old and New Testaments. They will provide really fine overviews of biblical history and content. If you are interested in this kind of substantive study I suggest you begin with *Jesus: An Historical Approximation* by Jose Antonio Pagola. This book is one of the finest introductions to the life of Jesus in the context of his first-century Jewish culture. After reading Pagola's book I suggest you turn to my book, *Lord, Teach Us To Pray: One Hundred Daily Reflections on Jesus' Life of Prayer*. These daily reflections, based on years of research, will

immerse you in Jesus' spiritual formation as a first-century Jew and the myriad ways his prayer became the energy for compassionate engagement in the lives of people around him.

When you have completed the two books mentioned above, I suggest you begin studying the Old Testament. I recommend *Reading The Old Testament: An Introduction (Second Edition)* by Laurence Boadt. This is the most complete and readable introduction to Old Testament content I have ever seen. It will take time to work through it, but I encourage this extra effort. A much shorter introduction is Mark Link's *These Stone Will Shout: A New Voice for the Old Testament*. Sadly, new copies are rarely available, but used copies may be found online. If you have little background in Old Testament study, this is the book to begin your journey.

Reading about the lives and wisdom of faith-filled Christians

We can direct our attention and thought to learning how Jesus was present in the example, prayer and writing of faith-filled women and men whose lives were filled with Jesus' presence. An excellent introduction is *Journey to the Heart: Christian Contemplation Through the Centuries*. (Edited by Kim Nataraja. New York: Orbis Books, 2011.) It gives short biographies and summaries of the writing of thirty-two women and men, ancient and modern.

Meditation and reflection on passages from the Bible

Meditation and reflection on the Bible, especially the four gospels and the psalms, are essential for persons who want to follow Jesus today. Daily or weekly reading and reflection on portions of the Bible help us remain rooted and grounded in Jesus' life and heritage. When we cannot make sense of what is going on around us in society, daily or weekly personal meditation on portions of the Bible can ground us in the roots of our tradition. If we become grounded in meditation and reflection on scripture and are willing to *listen to the biblical texts* (rather than impose our agenda for study or our search for meaning) we will hear different voices than our

own. Both in the liturgy and in personal meditation the Bible will challenge, inspire, and affirm. We will hear its unique spirit-filled wisdom rather than our own voices. We will see ourselves and the world in a light different from the complexities and chaos that surrounds our daily lives. This timeless vision and wisdom will empower us to hear the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and speak the Spirit's voice. We will see ourselves, each other, and the world in a way that is not limited to our personal knowledge and consciousness. We will be empowered to discern and take action in ways we cannot do on our own.

Here is a method for reflecting on portions of the Bible that has been used in the Christian tradition for fifteen-hundred years:

A Simple Form of Lectio Divina (listening to the Bible in a contemplative way)

- *Lectio Divina* means “divine or sacred reading” and is an ancient form of contemplative prayer found in many religious traditions. In the Christian tradition it has been an essential part of monastic prayer and is now common for Christians in all walks of life. It is a method for using the Bible as a path to contemplation through listening and responding to God's voice in scripture. *Its purpose is listening, rather than abstract analysis or study.* Lectio Divina is an opportunity for you to experience, to be with, and to remain in God; this is a threshold to contemplation and a place where the Holy Spirit leads you beyond saying prayers to become a person of prayer. You will become like the One you experience in prayer.
- Find a relatively quiet place and sit with your back straight, but not rigid.
Find a brief, perhaps familiar, passage from sacred scripture in your tradition and read it slowly three times with a period of silence after each reading.
- After the first reading, listen for a word or phrase that may attract you in a special way.

- After the second reading, let the passage speak to you personally and respond to what you may hear God saying to you in the passage.
- After the final reading, simply sit in silence for five or ten minutes, without further reflection on the passage, and rest in God's presence and wisdom.
- When your silent period is ended express simple thanks to God.

For learning more about Lectio Divina and suggestions for its use see:

Thelma Hall. *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina (With 500 Scripture Texts for Prayer)*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988 ISBN 0-8091-2959-0

Norvene Vest. *No Moment Too Small: Rhythms of Silence, Prayer, and Holy Reading*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1994. See Chapter Two. ISBN 1-56101-092-8

A Form of Praying with Scripture called Meletè

(adapted by David Keller from a practice of the desert Mothers and Fathers)

I recommended Meletè as a complement to daily Bible reading or study.

1. After reading or studying portions of the Bible, take some time to sit quietly and come into an awareness of God's presence. Leave your activity of the mind and enter a time of silence and solitude.
2. Choose a short passage (from those you have been studying or reading). Read the passage slowly, aloud if you are alone. Read it three times and then sit quietly, in silence, for five minutes. Avoid the desire to analyze the passage.
3. Take a word or phrase which stands out from the passage and let it enter your heart and mind. Repeat it several times.
4. End your time of solitude with a prayer.
5. Live with the word or phrase for the rest of the day, in the midst of all you do.

6. Just before bedtime recall the word or phrase. If there is time, write some thoughts in your journal. If not, simply recall the word or phrase. In either case, once you have recalled the word or phrase, give it up and let it go. End with a short thanksgiving.

Contemplative Prayer

There are so many voices and fearful situations clamoring for our attention and responses that we have difficulty knowing how and to whom to respond. Who is worthy of our loyalty and efforts? We can become torn and scattered and often feel powerless. What can one person do? Who is in charge? Our vision can become blurred and our energies dissipated. Who and what actions can we trust with such competition for our hearts and minds? Personal prayer is the venue for listening to Jesus who said, "*Make my word your home.*" Remaining in God's daily presence is the only way to restore vision and renew energy. Our personal prayer keeps us rooted in God in the midst of the clamor and chaos of society. And it is the only way to continue to see the natural goodness and sacredness in other people. We will lose hope without this positive vision.

Contemplative prayer, in its variety of forms, has always been and continues to be an essential part of following Jesus and Christian living. Many persons who desire a discipline of contemplative prayer are unaware of its presence in the Christian tradition and look for it in other religious traditions. Here are two simple forms of Christian contemplative prayer.

- ***Simple Sitting:*** Find a relatively quiet place, if you can. Otherwise use the space available. Sit comfortably with your back straight, but not rigid. With your eyes closed or partially open, begin breathing slowly in and out. Be conscious of your pattern of deep breathing. Let your body and your mind become as relaxed as possible. As your mind becomes relaxed you will experience many thoughts. Let them come and go. Try, as best

you can, to let your mind and inner being become empty. Let your whole being be an open vessel for God's presence and voice. Avoid expectations or hoped-for outcomes. Simply be present to God. Some persons repeat a word or short phrase in their mind to help let go of distracting thoughts and bring themselves back to silence of mind. You can choose a word that has special meaning to you. Some persons repeat a name for God such as "Holy One" or a short request such as "Come Holy Spirit". When you have sat in silence for about twenty minutes, open your eyes, wait for a minute or two, give thanks to God and then resume activity.

- **Contemplative Walking:** (This description of contemplative walking is influenced by the teaching of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen master in the Vietnamese tradition. For more detail see: *Walking Meditation*. Nguyen Anh-Huong & Thich Nhat Hanh. Boulder: Sounds True, 2006)

Find a place where you can have relative quiet and space for walking. Or simply use the space at hand. Stand motionless, begin a deep rhythm of breathing and let yourself become relaxed in body, mind and spirit. When you have become centered begin walking. Take small steps with your feet about shoulder's-length apart. Step slowly with a rhythm that allows your feet to alternate touching the ground without stopping between steps. (Remember, there is no right or wrong way.) Continue your deep breathing as you walk.

Remember that each step is the only step and that each moment is the only moment to be in the presence of God. Be aware of each foot's gentle contact with the earth, carpet or floor. Relax your mind and become aware of objects that appear as you

walk. Do not try to appreciate or analyze them. Let them be what they are as you encounter them.

Relax your jaw muscles by assuming a half smile. Continue walking without intention, purpose or destination. When distractions or thoughts appear try counting the number of steps you take as you inhale and exhale. This may help restore you to a relaxed attentiveness.

When you wish to end the walking, stop and continue your deep breathing for a minute or two. Offer thanks to God and resume your other activities. Contemplative walking can be very short, but it is best to allow 15-20 minutes. Once in a while try this form of contemplative prayer for an hour outdoors.

Do Not Worry About Results

The purpose of contemplative prayer is to place yourself in the presence of God without agenda or expectations. Do not worry if thoughts come, especially if you are worried, pressured by work to complete, or anxious about a friend or loved-one. Just rest in the quiet of God's love for you. That is enough, even though it may feel that nothing is happening. Entrust yourself to God.

Compassionate engagement with the life of the world

Jesus' life was his message. He moves from quiet listening and discernment in the desert to demonstrate the rushing-in of God's reign through his active and compassionate engagement in people's lives. This was his only purpose and passion.

Jesus made it clear that following him would not be easy and could be costly. “*Then Jesus said to them all, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’*” (Luke 9:23)

What does it mean to “take up a cross daily” in the twenty-first century?

How can anyone possibly do this? The answer is simple, but the way is not easy. Participating in the life and ministry of Jesus relies on *intimacy with God*. The exhortation of the desert father Abba Paul the Simple says it all: “Keep close to Jesus.” Our quiet listening, faithful discernment and active participation in the life of a faith community will form and empower our compassionate engagement in the life of the world. What will help us participate in the life and ministry of Jesus?

Ecology of soul

The Greek word *askeo* means “to take care of something.” An *ascetic* person is one who cares for something. *Asceticism* is a pattern or discipline of caring for something we value deeply. Throughout the Christian tradition the “ascetic life” (in a variety of forms) has been valued as a discipline that guides our life with God and reveals God’s desires for us and the world. Asceticism is not only for monks; it can be an essential part of the life of every follower of Jesus. It is the way we care for our whole being, that wonderful gift of God. It is caring for and being a steward of: thoughts, words, body, mind and spirit, actions, neighbor, and the earth.

As we have seen, it is possible to live on the surface of life in such a way that we lose touch with the deep-structure of life. In our fast-paced society it is possible to take the care of our soul for granted or, even worse, assume it is unimportant.

A rule of life will help us be good stewards of our life with God. What is a rule of life and why is it important? A rule of life is like the Torah that Jesus followed as a devout first-

century Jew. It is a teacher helping us walk a path in our life with God. It is freely chosen, not coerced. It is a constant reminder of what is most fundamental in life and helps us be single-minded in our desire to love God and our neighbor. A rule of life provides a combination of prayer, study, meditation, and work. It is a discipline that helps us care for our soul (body, mind, and spirit) and incarnate God's presence in our daily lives. Without a rule of life it is possible that our life with God will get lost or fade in the fast pace, noise, and multiple demands of modern society. It is a stable guide for living that will center our life and prevent intentional or unintentional scattering of our life with God. If you do not have a rule of life begin with a daily or weekly pattern of two or three practices that you consider basic in caring for your soul. Remember that these practices are not ends in themselves. The purpose is remaining in the company of God, not perfection!

Participating in the life of a faith community and its tradition is especially important.

Quiet listening, faithful discernment, and personal liturgies are essential. There is no substitute for direct experience of God. At the same time, Jesus' life demonstrates an integration of personal prayer with active participation in his Jewish faith community. As we have seen, Jesus always found time to listen to God, the world around him, and his inner self. This listening heart was the source of the guidance and desire which, along with direct experience of God's love, led and sometimes drove him into compassionate involvement in the lives of others. But all this took place in the context of his active involvement in the life of his religious community. The four gospels tell us that Jesus worshipped regularly in synagogues on the Sabbath and on occasion read from and commented on the Hebrew Scriptures. He participated in the major festivals and liturgies in the Temple in Jerusalem: *Sukkot*, the Feast of Booths and the Feast of Passover, *Pesah*, and Unleavened Bread. We have seen that in the desert following his baptism

Jesus responded to temptations with discernment based on his knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures. The gospels narrate Jesus' fluency in the Scriptures in the contexts of his teaching and ministry, especially the psalms and the prophets. He was not "proof texting." He experienced God's presence and guidance as he reflected on the Jewish scriptures. They formed an environment to discern God's presence and desires in his life and society.

Roots, common worship, spiritual formation, teaching, fellowship and mutual support

The roots of Jesus' Jewish faith community continued after his death and resurrection in the lives of his followers and formed a foundation for the evolution of Christian faith communities. These are timeless roots that transcend, yet are interpreted within, a variety of cultures and have sustained and empowered followers of Jesus in a variety of Christian traditions for two thousand years. A place to look for Jesus today is in the lives of persons who have entrusted their lives to the risen Christ and are committed to following him within a faith community.

A primary advantage of participation in a faith community is that it provides worship, sacraments, spiritual formation and teaching, fellowship, and opportunities for mutual support that we would miss if we design our own spiritual path. If we design our own spiritual path then we are limited to what we desire and miss opportunities to be formed by others and contribute to their spiritual lives. We limit our experience of God if we rely on ourselves.

There are many faith communities that reflect the richness of the Christian tradition. If you are not part of a faith community I recommend that you consider joining a congregation that follows the Christian liturgical year, has a focus on the sacraments—especially the Eucharist (Holy Communion), offers a variety of opportunities for spiritual formation, emphasizes study of the life of Jesus, mentors members in prayer and meditation, and involves both clergy and lay

persons in the leadership of the congregation. All these aspects form an environment of grace that will guide and empower you as a follower of Jesus.

- The liturgical year provides a cycle of seasons, feasts, and biblical reading that covers an overview of the life of Jesus and a wide variety of biblical readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. A common lectionary provides a three-year cycle of readings from the four gospels and a two-year cycle of daily readings from the Bible. These cycles provide a more complete narrative of Jesus' life and our biblical heritage and inhibit preaching and teaching that may overemphasize individual parts.
- Following Jesus involves mystery. Sacraments are tangible liturgies that unite participants with an unseen mystical presence of God's Spirit. The energy of God's Spirit acts upon participants whose lives are penetrated and changed within by encounters with ordinary things like water, oil, bread, wine, hands, and touch. Sacraments are pure gifts from God. Human openness and activity is involved, but what happens is beyond our control.
- In denominations that emphasize liturgies, the Eucharist is a primary sacrament that unites participants with the presence of Jesus. In baptism the Holy Spirit fills a person's life with God's energy and that same Spirit gathers followers of Jesus to form faith communities. In this way a congregation becomes the presence of the risen Jesus in today's world. The Eucharist—from a Greek word meaning giving thanks—is usually celebrated each Sunday. Within the Eucharistic liturgy the mystical presence of Jesus is experienced in the presence of other followers of Jesus, in hearing and reflecting on portions of the Bible, and in consuming the bread and wine. Through the power of the

Holy Spirit participants are filled again with Jesus' presence and are empowered to become the presence of Jesus in their daily lives.

Liturgical worship is filled with scripture, symbols, actions, mystery, and the presence of the risen Christ. It is an opportunity to temporarily leave *ordinary time* and enter *sacred time*. Although God is present in our ordinary and mundane days, sacred time gives us a different vision and experience of life. Sacred time and sacred presence, within the liturgy, will root us in life that is not tied to the limitations of chaos and human perspectives and power. Sacred time will help us see "the big picture" in the midst of instability, scatteredness, and powerlessness. The wisdom of the Bible in liturgy will help us take a longer view than what is available in ordinary time. In the Eucharistic liturgy we are reminded of who we are and once again experience Christ in ourselves, others who are present, sacred scripture, and in the sacrament of bread and wine. These are realities that chaos cannot touch or change!!

Where will following Jesus lead us?

Thomas Merton declares what is most fundamental for a follower of Jesus. "*What we are asked to do at present is not so much to speak of Christ as to let Him live in us so that people may find Him by feeling how He lives in us.*"¹

No one knows where following Jesus will lead. An incident in the first chapter of John's gospel describes an encounter of two disciples of John the Baptist with Jesus. John declares, "Behold the Lamb of God!" and the two men begin to follow Jesus. He turns to them and asks, "What are you looking for?" The men respond, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" Jesus invites them to "Come and see." (John 1:35-39)

¹ Quoted by Esther de Wall in *A Seven Day Journey With Thomas Merton*. Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1992, 29.

A timeless invitation

“Come and See” will evoke a unique response from each person. If we choose to follow Jesus, each step becomes an opportunity for our life to bear the imprint of the presence of God.

How will you respond?

