

## Growing In Grace #2—Reading and Prayer

Last week, we shared our beginning in Baptism and Faith. We discovered that coming to Faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord is a bit like falling in love. For the first time we see Jesus as our Friend as well as our Lord. We began a special relationship with Him, one that we want to grow and expand. But how are we to continue this growth in our relationship with Jesus?

The first way is to start Reading the Gospels. In the New Testament, we discover what Jesus said and did. From such reading, we can begin to understand what He wants to teach us, to help us learn, to understand how we can change and grow. The best book to start reading is the Gospel of St Luke. This Gospel was written by a doctor, a man who was Greek in his understanding but originally Jewish in his religion. I suggest that you read the whole Gospel of St Luke at once. It starts with the Birth of Christ and ends with His Resurrection and includes many stories and teachings of Jesus. It was written about the year 75AD, so it includes the stories and facts told to Luke by the Apostles and by others who knew Jesus intimately. Luke writes in a simple but factual manner. This Gospel is intimately connected to the Acts of the Apostles since that was also written by St Luke. Reading these 2 books together helps you understand how the Early Church believed and practised the teachings of Jesus Himself.

Once you have done this, you can check out the Gospel of St Mark, the first

gospel written, probably about 62AD, and the Gospel of St Matthew, written about 74AD, an enlargement of the Gospel of St Mark. You will get an entirely different view when you read the Gospel of St John, written about 95AD. This latter Gospel is not so much a story of the life of Jesus as a theological understanding of the meanings of what Jesus said. Once you have read the life of Jesus in the Gospel of St Luke and understood His teachings, you will be able to read the Gospel of St. John to help you understand the meanings of those teachings.

Reading the Letters written by St Paul will help you understand how the Teachings of Jesus were put into practise in the early Church. And the Epistle of Hebrews will give you a brilliant interpretation of the present work of Christ. The Book of Revelation will give you a glimpse into the future work of God, as seen through the eyes of the early Church. Don't take it literally because it is meant to be understood symbolically. It will give you a happy understanding of the future.

While you are exploring the teachings and love of Jesus, it is time to also explore the world of Prayer.

When you accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord, your prayers tended to be intercessions for others. That is good, and all through your life, you will be asking the Lord to bless and care for others.

But as you grow in the Faith, you will also want to say prayers of Adoration.

With prayers of Adoration, you will find yourself Thanking God, and then Adoring Him. As you grow in Faith, your prayers will include more and more of this kind of prayer. I have found that memorizing and repeating short prayers of Adoration keeps me in His Presence. In fact, as you advance in prayer, you will discover that God is all around you, in and through you and everyone else. God is the great life giver, filling everything with life and grace. Take a walk in the woods some day, and realize that all the life around you, from the earth, the trees, the animals, the air, everything comes from God, and is showing His Presence. As you realize this more, you will find yourself Thanking and Adoring God who is always Present. So many people go through life unconscious of His Holy and Loving Presence; don't let that happen to you. Get your mind off yourself and onto the Presence of God, and your Prayer life will change and grow.

Some Christians have gathered together into groups, to live and pray together; we call them Monks and Nuns. I have been a priest associate of the Order of the Holy Cross for almost 62 years. This Anglican Monastic order has supported me in prayer and helped me say Matins and Evensong every day for all those years. Saying the Daily Offices is a unique part of my life of prayer that brings me into solidarity with millions of others in all parts of Catholic Church, including the Anglican part. In this way, I can grow in my prayer life so that every day becomes a day of prayer and praise without ceasing. No matter what I am doing, God is always present, and I become aware of Him—walking, listening, and sharing with Him. You can do the same, by offering whatever you are doing, wherever you are, as a sacrifice of Love and prayer to Christ Jesus, your Saviour and Lord.

So, this Lent, I ask you to pray and praise the Lord, in any way that helps you. In that way you will be growing each day in His Grace and Love.

*Blessed Praised and Adored be Jesus our Lord on His throne of glory in heaven, in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, and in the hearts of all His faithful people. Amen*