

*“Do you know me?”*

It is so easy to profess love for something when it's abstract, softly blurred by distance and pleasantly vague. We can wax poetic about our love of adventure, love of nature or love of humanity. When people and things come into sharp focus it becomes more challenging. True love is personal and specific and is expressed through decisions, a willingness to sacrifice and to become vulnerable. True love starts with knowing the other. Do we know Jesus? Do we know those around us? Do we truly know ourselves?



During Lent we are called to increased prayer, self-reflection and spiritual growth. Through prayer, spiritual reading and reflection on scripture we come to know Jesus better. We can imaginatively place ourselves within the gospel stories and experience ourselves sitting at Jesus' feet. We can hear his words as if spoken personally to us. Opening space within ourselves to hear God's voice through times of stillness can help us experience our God who is as close to us as our breath. Reading spiritual books can challenge, clarify and affirm us in our path.

Self-reflection often flows naturally from these times of prayer. We begin to see our patterns, our fears and resistances, our gifts and strengths. A wonderful way to grow is to reflect on the day's events in light of our faith. We can ask ourselves questions about difficult interactions, like, "What was happening with me when I responded in that manner?" "What was I feeling?" "How could I respond differently in the future?" In this way we are learning about ourselves, knowing ourselves on a deeper level. You can even start writing a User's Manual for yourself, to prevent yourself from falling into the same patterns. My User Manual states, "Do not take yourself seriously when you are tired. Just go to bed."

Equipped with stronger self-knowledge we come to understand which people and situations set us off. We realize that our judgement is as much about ourselves as about the other. Releasing this judgement is like taking a filter off a camera. We have a new perspective. We can choose to see the other with curiosity and acceptance. I have been surprised to discover within an adversary, not malice, but simple, human hurt and vulnerability. Seeing this woundedness, compassion replaces bitterness. I've met some of the dearest people in my life this way.

These actions - praying, reflecting, forgiving and seeking forgiveness - form the life-long pattern of turning, ever more deeply, to God. Though challenging, our Lenten practice prepares us for the joy of Easter and the promise of the Resurrection. In time, may we learn to live all seasons as an Easter People.

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