

The Person of Christ

♪♪ Speak, Lord, I love to listen to your voice. See, Lord, here I am. ♪♪

What are you most longing for in your life? What is your heart, your mind, your soul, your deepest self seeking? St. Augustine said, long ago, that "Our hearts are ever restless until they rest in You, O God." We search for peace, love, beauty, truth, balance, security, life. But what we most deeply long for is more of a "Who" than a "What."

St Francis of Assisi put this search into a beautiful prayer:

"**You** are holy, Lord, the only God,/ **You** are love, **You** are wisdom, **You** are humility,/ **You** are patience, **You** are beauty, **You** are meekness,/ **You** are security, **You** are inner peace, **You** are joy; **You** are our hope & joy./ **You** are justice, **You** are moderation, **You** are all our riches, **You** are enough for us." (The Praises of God for Brother Leo)

Who is this God, this Lord?

Catholics begin most of their prayers, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." They end many prayers with "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit..." The God we seek is a blessed trinity.

In a way, God is more a verb than a noun.

Another way of saying this is simply "God is love." (I John 4:8, 16).

The mystery revealed by the Trinity is that **God is Relationship**.

The best way to understand and experience that mystery is to say that God is relationship - a mystery described by ancient writers using a Greek word, *Perichoresis*, which means, "a circle dance." God is a circle dance of love between the Creator, Christ and the Holy Spirit. And we are invited into this dance of love!

But how do we enter the dance? We enter the very life of God through Jesus Christ. St. Paul writes, "Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation" (Col 1:15).

Sometimes I pray by simply repeating the word, "Jesus," in silence while I breathe. I do this both when I am alone, and with a small group. This form of meditation is sometimes called "centering prayer," and it is one way to enter into relationship with the mystery of Christ who is beyond our understanding, but who is the bridge between God and humanity in his own person; the mediator between God and humanity. (I Timothy 2:5)

If you try this way of praying, your thoughts will swirl around, but you can go deeper than your surface thoughts by repeating the word, "Jesus" in your mind. You can do that in rhythm with your breathing - thinking the first syllable, "Je" -, as you breathe in, and the 2nd "sus," as you breathe out. Do this in your mind, as you are aware of each breath.

I first learned this type of prayer by using the words, "God is love" as I was aware of my breathing. Later on, I realized that the very name of Jesus means, "Yahweh is salvation" which is another way of saying, God is love.

Who is this Jesus whom we just placed at the center of our prayer?

We call him Jesus Christ. Jesus is his human name, but Christ is more of a title than a name. He's not Jesus, the son of Mr. & Mrs. Christ. The word, Christ is a translation into Greek of the Hebrew word for Messiah. It reflects his divinity, his relationship to God as the son of God, the living word of God.

To say "Jesus Christ," or "Jesus the Christ," is to enter into the deep mystery of how God has become a human being. To say Jesus Christ is to remember that Jesus is not just a historical figure who lived over 2,000 years ago, but he is the living Word of God made flesh, as we hear in John's Gospel, that he not only died on a cross, but was raised from the dead and lives today as the risen Christ.

To say Jesus Christ is to profess that he lives and is revealed by both male and female humanity - teaching us again the ancient truth that God created humans male and female, so both women and men are made in the image & likeness of our creator.

Jesus lived as a male human being in Palestine, but the risen Christ is both male and female, as Paul writes to the Galatians, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"

(Gal. 3:28, NRSV translation).

Jesus Christ is both human and divine. He was born, had a human family - he laughed, cried, ate, slept. And he is, at the same time, equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This is a mystery - not in the sense that we can't understand it, but like a bottomless pool that we can dive into, yet will never get to the very end. We'll never figure it out, but we can go deeper and deeper the more we dare to deepen our relationship with Jesus.

This is not so strange to our everyday experience - because every human being is a mystery, even to ourselves. Some parts of who I am are known only to God. And the love between human beings is itself a mystery, continually deepening as we mature and grow. I have experienced that in my own relationships with friends & family, and I have seen the mystery of love unfold in my 15 years of working in the ministry of Marriage Encounter.

There are many names that reveal who Jesus is. One of his favorite names for himself was, "son of man." It occurs 78 times in the Gospels. It is also used in the Old Testament to describe the coming Messiah. The core meaning of that phrase is, "the human one."

That name reveals the mystery that the Son of God chose to enter so deeply into our humanity that he became one of us -experiencing what it felt like to love, to be angry, to suffer and even to die.

This beautiful hymn found in the letter of St. Paul to the Philippians is not only a description of who Christ is, but of how we are called to walk in his footprints, as St. Francis would say.

Though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at.

Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in our likeness. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!

Because of this, God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every other name. So that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, and every tongue proclaim to the glory of God the Father: JESUS CHRIST IS LORD! (Philippians 2:6-11)

Jesus the Christ is not just someone to admire, or even to worship. We are called to follow him, to recognize him in each other, and in ourselves and to remember what he said, "Whatever you do for the least of my brothers & sisters, you do for me" (Or *to me*). We are called to meet him in our prayer; to seek to know his personal call to each of us, and to celebrate his presence with each other in the breaking of the bread, the Eucharist.

I meet Jesus every morning in my prayer, and ask him to reveal what he calls me to do that day, that hour, that moment. These are the words I use:

"Jesus, firstborn of creation, word made flesh, human one, suffering servant, risen Christ, radiant light, bread of life, open the doors you want opened, close the doors you want closed, place me in the center of your perfect will."

And then I listen - and sometimes hear this song,

♪♪ Here I am, Lord, is it I, Lord, I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, where you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart. ♪♪