

By Antonio Banuelos

When I was in my early childhood Catechism preparing for my First Communion, my teacher used to tell us that the Eucharist was a way to be closer to Jesus. I specifically remember her saying that "Jesus wants to be my friend and be with me at all times." I used to wonder how someone as important, and especially as busy as Jesus, would have the time to be my friend. My parents would tell me: "When you want to make a new friend, you have to talk to that person." Prayer was always present in my life. It was my way to get to know him better and find out if He really wanted to be my friend. My parents had a lot of emphasis on prayer but they did not give me much basis. Most of my Bible school was from the Gospel and from the Old Testament. The Old Testament would continuously tell me that people spoke to God through the prophets and through the priests. How can I be a friend of Jesus if I have to talk to him through a third party?

In Middle School I discovered the letter of the Apostles. There I found the answer on how to pray. In Philippians 4:6-7 I read "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" I am easily taken by the speed of the world which pulls us in a hundred different directions. The fast pace of my life, even in my teen years, has brought new levels of anxiety and stress. I am so overwhelmed sometimes that it is difficult to find Jesus in my schedule. That simple passage always has the answer to my stress. Why worry? Why the constant whirlwind? Once I start shaking, I forget that God is the one that decides what will be, not me. I forget that it is God that controls what will happen, regardless of how much I try to change it. Even Jesus in the midst of his passion, abandoned by His friends, seeing His disciples sleeping, instead of losing it and complaining, He presented His request to God: "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." As I have embarked in different endeavors in my life, as I have left my homeland, as I struggle with the crossroads of two cultures, I come back to that passage; unfortunately most of the times I remember it when I am about to check myself in the asylum. However, once I take the opportunity to stop, breathe, and recognize God's might and love I can put my prayer before Him. I heard Msgr. Chiodo say on the radio one time: "There is a God, and I am not Him." When I see projects take a complete opposite direction to what I expected and I start assuming the position to pull my hair out my wife will tell me: "You have not prayed enough, have you?" Prayer allows me to realize that Jesus is the one carrying me when I only see on a set of prints. It is in finding that peace when I present my request to God that allows me to see Jesus in my everyday life. Even a simple "Glory to God" or an even simpler "Good Morning, Jesus" sets a whole different perspective to my day. My days are better when I put it in God's hands in thanksgiving. I am following Christ, regardless of what the world holds for me.

Prayer has helped follow Christ. However, prayer by itself can become a very personal and individual aspect of my faith. It helps me feel Jesus as my heart is burning. But one thing is to feel Him, and another one is to HAVE HIM next to me. In prayer I communicate with Jesus and I follow Jesus. But it is through community that I live with Jesus. Jesus tells us in Matthew's Gospel "For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (18:20). So, in order to have Jesus here, I need others around me so I can have Him in our midst. That need to live in Christ and to

Have Christ has led me to participate actively in my community. I have been a Knight of Columbus for five years and a member of the Christian Family Movement for the last three. I need to be surrounded by those whose hearts are burning to Walk and Live in Christ. I am certain that every time that I meet with them, Jesus is in our midst. We learn a lot from each other into how to build the Kingdom, into how to make the world a little better. When I invite another man to join the Knights or when Mayra and I visit a family to invite them to Christian Family Movement I am inviting more to be around me so that Jesus will be more in our midst. As an engineer I like to think mathematically. Jesus said two or three gathered in His name is enough for Him to be in our midst. How much more presence will He have if it is 10, 20 or 50? Why am I a Knight? So I can live better in Christ. Why do we promote Christian Family? Because being with my friends brings me to Christ.

Outside my wonderful wife and kids, the rest of my family is back in Mexico. We now have a great extended family that accompanies us in Walking in Christ. I know that it is through prayer that I can have a deep relationship with Christ. But I also know that it is only through my involvement in the community that I will be Living in Christ. When Jesus looks at me and says "Follow Me" it is my community that will push me when I hesitate and that will pick me up when I fall. Jesus knows that my legs are weak, and that is why He gave me such a large family through my community and such a wonderful home in my Diocese.