

## Interaction with the Lord?

One of the things we see in the Gospels is our Lord's frequent interactions with others. The Apostles form a special inner circle, if you will, with Him but there are many others that He interacts with. Just last Sunday, for example, we saw our Lord's interaction with Nicodemus. Man, I might say, if only I had been alive then, I sure would like to interact with Him like that. Has it really stopped? Perhaps it is that we should turn to Scripture and see how our Lord actually does interact with people.

The "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" states that Jesus taught with *both* words *and* deeds. In other words, what Jesus did, His actions, were as much of a teaching as His words. Of course, this had been known and understood from the beginning, but this formal document of the Church brings it out explicitly.

In reading Sacred Scripture, there might be a tendency to focus only on the text – what Jesus said. And of course that is important but attention should also be paid to what He did, how He did it, and what He didn't do. His greatest teaching through action was His Passion, but there are many more. These are helpful to us in numerous ways. For one, they are an example to us of how we are to be. They also often show how it is that our Lord interacts with us, or at least desires to interact with us. They show, first of all, that it *is* His intent to *interact* with us, that we really get to know Him, not just have us pass through with indifference.

One example is when our Lord went into the region of Tyre and Sidon. A lady's daughter was possessed and naturally the mother wanted our Lord to deliver her from the demon. In this event, it can be noticed that our Lord makes Himself available, but then leaves room for us to respond. Notice what He did *not* do – He did *not* run over to the lady and give her a big hug and tell her everything was going to be alright. He made Himself available and then gave her room to respond. This is frequently how He acts with us. And what happens if we don't respond? Nothing. Well, nothing good anyhow, nothing really worthwhile, nothing pertaining to the true purpose of this life.

During Lent there are several readings from weekday Mass that also show how our Lord acts and how we are inclined to act. The Gospel this past Monday gives an example. A man came to our Lord and asked him to heal his son who was dying. The man insisted that our Lord *come* to his house, and then touch Him or say some special words or some such thing. In other words, the man not only had a petition to place before our Lord, but he had also decided how exactly, and when, Jesus was supposed to do it! Our Lord would not go. He chided the man mildly, saying unless you people see signs and wonders you will not believe. What Jesus did instead was say: go, your son will live. And Scripture says...the man believed Him. The man had a weakness of faith, and so our Lord gave him an opportunity to act with faith; he did and his son was cured and, even more importantly, so was his weakness of faith.

This sort of approach to our Lord – coming to Him with instructions on how He should go about giving me what I want – occurs with some frequency in the Gospel. The person not only has some petition for our Lord but also what, how, and when exactly our Lord is supposed to satisfy their request! Martha is another example. It is a lack of faith, a lack of trust in the goodness, the power, and the "wisdom" (if you will) of God. It is also rather presumptuous to think that we need to give our Lord instructions on what, how, and when He ought to do something – unintentional, perhaps, but presumptuous nonetheless. There is a lack of trust and a lack of trust is a barrier in my relation to God. So our Lord seeks to remove that barrier. In each case where someone comes to our Lord with their plan of what, when, and how He should fulfill their request, He refuses to go along with it. Now it might seem ridiculous that someone would presume to tell the all-knowing God what He should do, how to do it, and when to do it. But yet how often do we do the same? Now listen Lord, I really need this piece of machinery so please make this particular one sell cheaply at this particular auction. That's maybe a ridiculous example but it is just to illustrate the point; the point is to take it and use it to analyze the way in which I speak to the Lord and present my petitions to Him. As we have said before, it is Mary who taught us how to present petitions to our Lord. At the wedding feast of Cana, she came to her Divine Son and simply said: they have no wine. She did not give Him instructions on what to do about it. She knew that whatever He did, even if nothing, that would be the best thing. Do we have that trust?

Let us go further, now, in using Scripture on how our Lord interacts with us so that we know how to be towards Him. Last Tuesday's Gospel was the man at the pool of Bethesda. The man had been coming there for 38

years to be healed of his infirmity and was never able to get to the pool in time to be healed. There was no one to help him. So Jesus came to up to the man and asked him...what? He asked him if he wanted to be healed. Does he want to be healed?! Our Lord wouldn't have even needed His Divine power to know that the man wanted to be healed, so why did He ask? A "completed" love – a love that saves – is not one-sided, it is reciprocal and for love to be reciprocal there has to be a response from the other person. With this in mind, the question of why our Lord asked can be answered. Jesus could have just stood off from a distance and healed the man with a simple act of His Divine Will. In that case the man would have never known how he was healed or who healed him; in other words, no relation with our Lord (which is what leads to eternal life) would have been established; although we are prone to forget about eternal life and focus only on the here and now, eternal life is always first and foremost with our Lord. In asking him if he wanted to be healed, then, our Lord does several things. First, it shows us that God does not force Himself on anyone, we must choose to accept. And choosing to accept is much more than just getting baptized and/or saying Jesus, Jesus, I believe, I believe. The man does respond to our Lord. Suppose he had not; suppose he just sat there sullenly or told Jesus to just go away. What would have happened? Once again, nothing – our Lord would have went away. To save us, love has to be reciprocal, we have to respond. With this question, our Lord draws the man's attention to his infirmity, his suffering, and thus also excites within him the desire and hope of being healed. This is an important example in Sacred Scripture, a question that our Lord poses to us as well: do you want to be healed? His physical healings were a sign of the greater interior healing of the soul that our Lord wants to bring about through us embracing His mercy – repentance, Confession, conversion. If I turn up nose and say: I'm a good person, then nothing happens. I do not get to know our Lord as Savior, which is His core identity.

These things can be tied together so as to get an overall understanding of some important, fundamental ways that our Lord interacts with us. He makes Himself available, but allows us room to respond. If we don't respond, then nothing happens. If nothing happens our whole life, then it is very likely that when we come to the end of our lives we will be stepping into the brink of death completely alone, no matter how many people we are surrounded by. Our Lord has made Himself available, how does a person respond? It's not just a matter of showing up once in awhile; it's not just a matter of doing some bare minimum; it is not a matter of being indifferent. What kind of a response would that be? If we truly seek our Lord and make that the first and most important thing, then He responds. And how is a person to seek? Well, is it really all that complicated? It is, once again, like building relation with anyone else. We respond by making time to be with Him; there's more to that than just showing up for Mass once a week and then forgetting about it. There is study of our faith, things like reading the lives and writings of our faith – I want to get to know Him better. There is stopping by the church to pay Him a little visit in the Blessed Sacrament; there is, as has been said before, no substitute for spending time with the Beloved. There is personal prayer and real participation in the sacraments. There is meditation on His Passion, like with the Stations. Then there is living the faith in everyday, which also entails putting aside our sins. Now as a person begins to do these things and experiences real silence, where everything else is put aside for a while and the person really raises their mind to God, they will become more aware of His presence. They will begin to focus more and more on our Lord, and begin to desire to be with Him. Then they will become more and more aware not just of particular sins, but that they are really a sinner. The healings that our Lord performed were a sign of a number of things but maybe most of all they were a sign of the interior healing that He wishes to bring about. As we sit in silence before Him, we will become aware of the question he asked the man at the pool in Bethesda: Do you want to be healed. If we turn away, remain sullen – if we do not respond – then nothing will happen. If we do respond and continue to do so even when we don't want to, then look out – you have stepped onto the path to Heaven.

Let us end with some of our Lord's words to Sr Josefa about His Passion, which will help bring home all that has been said here:

“In the prison I was insulted and ill-treated by soldiers who were my enemies. In the Tabernacle most often it is they who call Me their Father who treat Me thus, but how unlike that of children is the treatment. In the prison I endured cold, sleeplessness, hunger and thirst, pain, shame, solitude, and desertion. And there passed before My mind's eye all the Tabernacles where in the course of ages I should lack the shelter of love, the icy-cold heart that would as hard and unfeeling as the stones of the prison floor were to My numbed and wounded body.” Let's do better than that. He waits for you. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.