Fr. Perozich comments —

Knowing something or someone is a process in the mind, the intellect whereby new facts are first received and then pondered for new comprehension. It never is a finished process, rather ongoing if one engages it.

Loving something or someone is a process of the will, both a conscious choice and sometimes an unconscious attraction that can overwhelm the soul with the desire to unite and to possess the object of desire.

Knowing Jesus is good. Loving Him wherein a force so strong seeks Him always would guide a Christian to cling to the Lord and to be so overwhelmed with love, that such love would be shared with anyone the Christian meets.

A romantic crush wherein a person constantly thinks and desires another might serve as an example.

An object desire such as the perfect home or perfect vehicle that a person wants to show off to everyone is another example.

Sometimes love is just overwhelming.

Other times, love needs to be cultivated by being in contact, in conversation, in reflection of another. With God, I think this is the case. The saints did it, and were rewarded with joys and sufferings, and finally were able to embrace the object of desire fully after passing to eternal life.

The Church should be a place where such encounters take place to bring the faithful into love with Jesus. When controversies and distractions dominate such as immigration, sexual license, rites of the Mass, ambiguous teaching, and on, Jesus fades into the background.

Avoid these. Draw close to Jesus in prayer, in personal conversation with Him, in sacrament. Pour out your joys, sorrows, your whole being and be bathed in His love and response in grace. Your love for Him will grow as did the love of the saints who gave everything for Jesus.

Elaine Hallet wrote this article 36 years ago, reappearing today in the New Oxford review.

If you want to know and to love Jesus for joy in this life, read on.

The article is long, so some might want to read it in bites, rather than to swallow the whole reflection all at once.

Knowing & Loving Jesus

NO ABSTRACTION, HE

By Elaine Hallett | July-August 1990
New Oxford Review

Elaine Hallett, of New York City, is the co-author of two books on Renaissance Drama, The Revenger's Madness and Analyzing Shakespeare's Action. She was an editor at Theatre Arts Books for seven years.

A much-loved Gospel passage reports an incident in which Peter and the other apostles set out one night by boat to cross the Sea of Galilee, leaving Jesus to catch up with them later. Our Lord joins them, somewhere in the middle of that vast and tempestuous lake, by walking across the water. In St. Matthew's version of the incident, Peter experienced two kinds of fear. Fear of the unknown struck him first. Peter was hardly expecting the arrival of a visitor there in the middle of a raging sea, and he took Jesus for a ghost. The disciples would eventually learn that our Lord always turns up at unexpected times, when He is most needed, but the apparition on the sea was startling, and Peter was terrified. That fear subsided when Jesus announced who He was: "It is I; be not afraid." Peter's second fear was different. He had said to Jesus, "Lord, if it be really you, bid me come to you on the water." Jesus did. And then Peter did. He did the incredible thing. Believing, he imitated Jesus, and he too walked on the water. Soon, though, Peter became conscious of what he was being called to do; the result was again fear, but this time fear of his own inadequacy.

There is a way in which all converts to Christ must struggle with the same fears that unsettled Peter — first the fear that arises when Jesus or the Church, His body, is seen at a distance and appears to be something strange and menacing, more threatening even than one's own personal storm; second, the fear that arises later, when Jesus is dear and familiar and has made you His disciple, and then calls you to perform some task that seems quite beyond your capacities. When I was asked to craft an essay that would explain how one moves from believing in Jesus to loving Him, I was delighted — until I realized I was out of the boat and in the water right up to my neck!

Well, the passage from Matthew suggests a starting point. Whatever the difficulty — Peter's, mine, yours — one had better grasp Jesus' hand. **How do you make the leap from believing in Jesus to loving Him? There is only one answer — with His help! The most practical step in that direction would be to implore Him to allow it.** And though it is seemly to be humble in your petitions, there is a difference between being humble and being feeble. The Canaanite woman of Matthew 15, who had the humility to consider herself as unworthy as the hounds who received crumbs from the Master's table, was hardly feeble in her prayers. St. Matthew tells us through her example that continued prayer, incessant prayer, prayer even in the face of a shattering rebuff, is always answered. Such prayer bespeaks faith, and Jesus consistently rewards faith. **Implore Him, then, with her words: "Lord, help me."**

Of course you can make it difficult or easy for Jesus to answer your prayer. You can merely pray, and then go on with your busy life, too absorbed to notice His attempts to attract you. I'd like to suggest a few practical steps that might make it easier for Jesus to grant you the grace you have prayed for. I offer these in the order that they were introduced to me, with the hope that He will inflame your heart through at least one of them, perhaps even through all.

The title of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Does Jesus Know Us, Do We Know Jesus? hints at a very real obstacle to loving Jesus — knowing too little about Him. Certainly it was an obstacle I had to remove. Do you know Jesus? In Romano Guardini's remark that an individual tends in early stages of the spiritual life to think of God rather abstractly, I had to recognize myself. To me, God was Goodness. He was Wisdom. He was, above all, infinite Light. But He was never a personal God, much less a person. Nor, really, was Jesus. Big strides came when I surrendered to the idea of personality. I began to take seriously Jesus' assertion that, "I am the way and the truth and the life," particularly His immediate clarification of that statement, "No one comes to the Father but by Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; henceforth, you know Him, and have seen Him." This promise aroused in me a desire to find out more about Jesus.

Guardini's The Lord did for me what a lifetime of reading the Gospels had not done. He made me see Jesus with new eyes. Having apparently encountered many people like me to whom Scripture was so familiar that they read "over" it or "past" it, seeing the words but never penetrating to the mysteries they contained, Guardini knew how to make everything fresh. One saw Jesus as if for the first time (or with greater depth than before). Through Guardini's The Lord, Jesus became a real person for me; through that author's The Humanity of Christ, He became even more — God become man, God made visible and lovable. I felt like Bartimaeus, who had been cured of blindness.

Even then I was not entirely aware of what I was onto. Probably George W. Rutler's insistence in The Impatience of Job that there is a vast difference between knowing about God and knowing God directly added intensity to the light that had begun to illuminate my understanding. The difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus directly is tremendously important — one can become a great expert on the life of Jesus without ever experiencing His love. **So while reading about**

Him is essential, there is another practical step that can be taken to insure that one's knowledge grows not merely in the head but in the heart. This is to live always in the presence of Jesus.

We cannot, alas, know God so directly as to see Him face to face. Were He to reveal His presence to us fully, we could not bear it. To stand fully in God's presence is not only to see oneself as one is but to see how one's own sins befoul His purity. Who among us in his present state could survive that shock? God does not, in kindness, lift the veil that protects us from the blinding splendor of Absolute Truth. Nevertheless, though hidden from our mortal eye, He is with us not just for an hour on Sunday but every day, every hour, every moment. And most of us could be more aware of His presence than we are. This, at least, was my experience. I made a concerted effort to be awake to the fact that I stood always before His eye and in His heart. The result was that I grew much closer to Him. It began to matter to me whether I had pleased or offended Him.

Two books that helped me develop the constant awareness of God's presence that is the foundation of any deeper relationship with Him were The Way of the Pilgrim and Brother Lawrence's The Practice of the Presence of God. From the Pilgrim **I learned to put myself in god's presence during idle moments — on the street, in the subway, behind the wheel; from Brother Lawrence, during busy moments — in the kitchen, at the office, and so on.**

The Pilgrim was a Russian peasant whose ears were opened one day at the liturgy to the biblical command, "Pray unceasingly." Perplexed by this command, he went in search of a teacher who could tell him how to obey it. Eventually he came upon an old hermit of the Philokalia tradition who had the secret. By this venerable staretz the Pilgrim was instructed to repeat the Jesus Prayer — saying (silently) with each in-breath "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God" and with each out-breath "have mercy on me,

a sinner." He was to breathe Jesus in and his sins out in this way, and he was to do it, that first day, 3,000 times. The next morning he returned to the Elder, proud of his achievement, but instead of praise he received an instruction to repeat the prayer 6,000 times. Great spiritual masters have a way of finding out immediately whether you are serious or not! But the instruction also had its point — eventually the prayer became as natural as breathing. To breathe was to pray, and the Pilgrim lived out his life in the constant presence of God.

Brother Lawrence's practice, set forth most concisely in Conversation 4 of The Practice of the Presence of God, was to offer every task to God before he undertook it and to give Him thanks, after completing it, for His help. **"Our sanctification,"** he would say, **"does not depend upon some alteration in what we do, but in doing for God what we commonly do for ourselves."** Brother Lawrence found that **"the best means of drawing near to God was through the common tasks which obedience laid down…purging them as far as lies in us from every human ingredient, and performing them all for the pure love of God."** Here again e**ffort is required at the beginning, but "habit comes finally, and produces the action without thinking about it**, and with wondrous joy," so that the soul becomes as much at one with God in times of work as in times of prayer. The advice is hardly new. The miracle of Brother Lawrence's little book is that seeing the effects it produced in him induces one to heed that advice.

Living constantly awake to the presence of Jesus is essential, I think, to making the leap from belief, however firm, to a fervent love for our Lord. By the very process of placing yourself in His presence, you drive from your mind much of the dross that had previously stood between you and made Him seem distant. You will notice another concrete sign of growing love — you behave more kindly toward Him.

Another way to know Jesus directly is to listen intently to His words. From St. John we learn that Jesus is Himself the Word, God's Word made flesh, who came to dwell among us so He could speak the Word. As He told both the fishermen who became His disciples and the Pharisees who didn't, "what I speak is not from myself but from my Father who sent me." It behooves you to hear every word that Jesus speaks as having been spoken directly to you, for indeed it is. Meister Eckhart, interpreting a passage from Jeremiah, says that God's Word is a kiss on the mouth of the soul. To hear the truth from Him who is the Truth, and to love that truth, is to love Jesus.

A remarkable advance in my relationship with Jesus came when I changed my way of reading the Bible. Instead of deciding to read, say, John's Gospel and setting out at a gallop to do it, as if the point were to cross the finish line, I learned to sit down with a single passage. **I learned to read that passage very, very slowly, listening to each word. I learned to read the passage a second time. Then once more. And then again. The slow pace was as important as the repetition.** At that pace, I began to notice that almost inevitably some phrase from the passage would exert a strong attraction. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you." "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." "Abide in my love." In early days I would push past these special moments, unintentionally cutting off precious interior movements of the soul. But in time I learned to pause, to rest in those words, to listen to Him speak.

I felt a deeper intimacy with Jesus when I began to unite my life to His as His life unfolds during the Church's liturgical year. "Abide in me," Jesus had counseled. Living His liturgical life was one way to do that. Each year, between the holy days of Christmas and Easter, Christ is born, grows in wisdom, embarks upon His teaching mission, is crucified under Pontius Pilate, rises from the dead, and ascends into

Heaven. Forty days after Easter He sends the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. From there the Church year moves into the long period that represents His risen life and the anticipation of His Second Coming. Since under God's eternal gaze the whole of this life remains eternally present, the individual soul who truly lives Jesus' life in union with the Church year breaks through the limitations of time and lives truly, through Him and with Him and in Him, in that same eternity. In contemplating His word through the mediation of the liturgy, one can be present at the events in His life.

During Advent, of course, one contemplates the prophecies of Jesus' entrance into time and history, and during Christmas His Incarnation in the flesh. One Advent exercise I found most fruitful was to be conscious of the extraordinary significance all the Gospel writers give to the ordinary word "Come." Through this word they make manifest the magnetic attraction between His promise to teach us and our longing to learn. He was asked, "Where do you live?" He replied, "Come and see!" He calls us, and we call to Him. Maranatha: "Come, Lord Jesus" — into my heart, my life, my world. At Christmas it is only natural to focus one's meditations upon Jesus as a baby. Try responding to this baby as did those privileged to recognize Him in His own lifetime: Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, and so on. Imagine Mary adoring the Christ child and spend prayer time in the stable of that ancient inn, beside her, gazing upon Him. Marvel that through the force of divine Love the infinite Being who rules the earth, the waters, and the heavens made Himself small enough to be encompassed in the finite space of Mary's womb.

In the period between Christmas and Lent, one might try to know Jesus as the common folk of His time met Him, to experience, for example, how He healed them both physically and spiritually. In Bible classes I have seen people grow annoyed because the figures Jesus meets in the Gospels are not highly individualized. We are told very little about the paralytic whom

Jesus approaches at the pool of Bethesda (John 5) or about the 10 lepers He cures on the road to Jerusalem (Luke 17) or about the woman taken in adultery (John 8) or about the man born blind (John 9). Obviously the anonymity with which these historical characters are rendered serves to highlight Jesus and the kinds of deformities He healed. But, beyond that, this anonymity allows the passage to touch you at a deeper, more personal level. Any one of these suffering creatures could be you. The Gospel writers meant for you to experience Jesus as the sick man did. Further, they expected that the physical deformity would inspire you to contemplate a corresponding spiritual deformity. Try, during this period of the liturgical year, to meet Jesus in this way. Stand in the sick man's place. See Jesus approaching. Beg Him to cure your blindness. Or your paralysis. Afterward, return, like the tenth leper, and give Him thanks. Another year meet Jesus as a teacher. Absorb yourself in His parables. Be among the apostles as Jesus explains them.

Certainly the Lenten portion of the liturgical year becomes far more meaningful if one endeavors to comprehend the agonies Jesus is enduring. Most spiritual directors agree that the deepest love for Jesus grows out of the contemplation of His passion. One can (and should) meditate upon Jesus' sufferings through the Scriptures. But let me recommend two Lenten readings from other sources that vastly intensified my love for Jesus. In one of the Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations, "On the Mental Sufferings of Our Lord," John Henry Newman carries you so deeply into the experience of Jesus at Gethsemane that you see precisely why "That tormented Heart, the seat of tenderness and love, began at length to labour and to beat with such vehemence" that "His blood overflowed His veins and burst through His pores." In Showings Lady Julian of Norwich recounts her visions of the crucifixion. These two narratives are not for the fainthearted. Each forces you to encounter Christ's sufferings in a

way that will prevent you from ever again taking them for granted. Julian writes, for example:

I saw that at the time when our blessed Savior died upon the Cross there was a dry, bitter wind; and when all the precious blood that might had flowed out of his sweet body, there still remained some moisture in the sweet flesh. It was dried up from within by bloodlessness and anguish, from without by the blowing of the wind and the cold, all concentrated upon Christ's sweet body; and as the hours passed these four circumstances dried up Christ's flesh. And though this pain was bitter and piercing, still it lasted a very long time. I saw the sweet flesh drying before my eyes, part after part drying up with astonishing pain. And as long as there was any vital fluid in Christ's flesh, he went on suffering.

But as Julian testifies to the agonies, she testifies as well to the response they are capable of arousing: "I felt unshakably that I loved Christ so much more than myself that there was no pain which could be suffered like the sorrow which I felt to see Him in pain." So with Newman. They deepen one's participation in Jesus' Lenten sufferings.

Had Jesus' life ended with His death, there would be no point in our striving to live it. Thus, between Easter and Advent comes an important period in the liturgical year called Ordinary Time during which the liturgy reflects upon Jesus' risen life, the period when Jesus is at work in the Church. What better way to experience His risen life than to watch the King, over the centuries, transforming those who love Him into images of Himself, images of Truth and Life. During this period I often turn to the saints. In each saint Jesus lives again — praying, teaching, healing, bringing sanctity and renewal to this recalcitrant earth. Excellent biographies exist: Henri Daniel-Rops's St. Paul, Athanasius's Life of St. Anthony, St. Augustine's own Confessions, Eddius's Life of St. Wilfrid, Bede Jarrett's Life of St. Dominic, L.H. Petitot's Life and Spirit of Thomas Aquinas, William Thomas Walsh's St. Teresa of Avila, the Autobiography of St. Therese of

Lisieux, Bernard Ruffin's Padre Pio: The True Story, Johannes Steiner's Therese Neumann. Truly, these holy men and women, several of whom were so conformed to Christ that they bore His wounds (Therese Neumann, in fact, actually suffered His passion every Friday of her later life) give evidence of one of the ways in which Jesus kept His promise "to be with you always, even unto the end of the world." To watch Jesus instilling His own life into these mortal bodies century after century to the extent that He does is to know Him intimately in still another way that inspires love.

Central to Jesus' risen life is the Eucharist, which is appropriate to contemplate not only during Ordinary Time but throughout the Church year. Here we come to the most accessible meeting place between the soul and Christ. Jesus in His last days on earth made it plain that "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." In the Eucharist, above all, Jesus is with us until the end of time.

The altar, as Guardini said so beautifully, **"is the threshold to God's immanence. Through Christ God ceased to be the Unknown, the Inaccessible One; He turned to us, came to us, and became one of us in order that we might go to Him and become one with Him.** The altar is the frontier, the border where God comes to us and we go to Him in a most special manner." Jesus descends into the Host at every Eucharist when the words of consecration are repeated. At the Eucharist before the altar we can meet Jesus in the most intimate way possible in this earthly stage of our existence; here, His prayer to the Father that we become one with Him as He and the Father are one can be realized.

How do you make the leap from believing in Jesus to loving Him? Stand always in His presence, remembering that your smallest action, done for His sake, can give Him pleasure. See Him as a person, not as a distant and formless abstraction. Know Him better, for knowing

bridges the gap between believing and loving. Listen to His Word, for through it He speaks directly to you. Pray that he will breathe the fire of divine love into your heart, that you may love Him with a more than human love. Unite your very life to His by living the liturgical year. Above all else receive Him often in the Eucharist. It is difficult to underestimate the effects of receiving Incarnate Love inside you daily. Ultimately, you become an image of that love.