

Adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament is an intensely personal experience. As such it sustains that personal relationship with Jesus Christ that defines the spiritual life of every Christian.

The phrase “personal relationship with Jesus Christ” may for some of us carry a Protestant connotation. Indeed, it is a central part of the devotional life of a good Protestant and is frequently promoted by their teachers and preachers. But it is also profoundly Catholic.

What exactly does it mean and why does it require promotion and repeated emphasis? To answer this question, it will be helpful to think about the meaning of the words “relationship” and “personal.”

Put very simply, a relationship is a connection of any sort. Any given thing can have many kinds of connection with any other thing. Obviously, however, we want to look at relationships among persons. These also come in many varieties, defined primarily by the level of closeness involved. You have a relationship, a connection, with the person who delivers your newspaper. You also have a relationship with your spouse. While both are relationships, the difference is immense.

That difference is based upon the degree of closeness, that is, of knowledge and love, of awareness, support, and shared emotional life. My relationship with the newspaper carrier, while it may be cordial, is quite “impersonal.” Another way to describe it would be to say that it is purely “functional.” The spousal relationship, on the other hand, is usually the most “personal” human relationship any of us experiences.

You see the connection with my topic: the quality of our relationship with Christ. Unfortunately, for many who think of themselves as Christians, that relationship remains on an impersonal, even functional, level. As Catholics, we may come to church and obey the rules, we may accept church doctrines at some basic level, we may fulfill all the sacramental regulations. If, however, these observances constitute the extent of our involvement with Jesus Christ, our faith remains basically “impersonal.”

In such a case, where is the love? Where is the awareness of the presence of Jesus in my daily life? Where is the desire to come closer to him, to know him better? Where is the happiness that comes from knowing that I am loved and that he is beside me in all I do and that he will sustain me in this “valley of tears”? Where is my desire to give and to sacrifice for his sake and to love others in him?

That impersonal, functional relationship with Christ has no staying power. If that is our level of faith-life, we are like the seed in Matthew 13 that falls on rocky ground. It “has no root and lasts only for a time.” I am convinced that much of the abandonment of membership in the Catholic Church today is a result of the shallowness of faith. That impersonal, merely functional relationship with Christ is easily jettisoned when opposition arises or mere inconvenience intervenes.

On the other hand, there is in our culture today a deep thirst for an abiding relationship with the Lord. The desperation and loneliness of modern life is a cry out of an emptiness which only God can fill. St. Augustine said it in his *Confessions*: “Our hearts were made for you, O Lord, and they are restless until they rest in you.”

Our youth, especially, are often telling us that they are not satisfied with a mere functional and impersonal religion. We have failed to witness to them that deep personal relationship with Christ that they seek, even though they may not know that such is their longing.

The practice of Adoration can establish and nourish that personal relationship with Jesus Christ which alone will uphold our Catholic faith amidst the secular onslaughts that daily threaten to overwhelm us.

But what do I actually DO at Adoration to develop this relationship? More about that in future articles.