

ASH WEDNESDAY
MARCH 6, 2019

Once again we hear the prophet Joel exhort us to “Rend your hearts, not your garments” (Jl. 2:13), Jesus exhort us to pray, fast and give alms/service to our neighbor (Mt. 6) and so “be reconciled” (made one again) with God (II Cor. 5:20-6:2). But to what end?

Recently I read part of address that St. Mother Teresa gave to her religious order, the Missionaries of Charity. Late in her life, one urgent concern she had for her sisters was that many had not allowed themselves to truly encounter Jesus’ love for them, despite the many prayers, fastings, works of service and other religious practices they had engaged in. Her pleading words spoke to me as the focus of these holy days that open before us.

I worry some of you still have not really met Jesus—one-to-one—you and Jesus alone. We may spend time in chapel—but have you seen with the eyes of your soul how He looks at you with love? Do you really know the living Jesus—not from books, but from being with Him in your heart? Have you heard the living words He speaks to you?

As for the grace. He is longing to give it. Never give up this daily intimate contact with Jesus as a real living person—not just an idea.

Be careful of all that can block that personal being in touch with the living Jesus. The hurts of life, and sometimes your own mistakes—[may] make you feel it is impossible that Jesus really loves you, is really clinging to you. This is a danger for all of you. And so sad, because it is completely opposite of what Jesus is really wanting, waiting to tell you.

Not only He loves you, even more—He longs for you. He misses you when you don’t come close. He thirsts for you. He loves you always, even when you don’t feel worthy. Even if you are not accepted by others, even by yourself sometimes—He is the one who always accepts you.

My children, you don’t have to be different for Jesus to love you. Only believe—You are precious to Him. Bring all you are suffering to his feet—only open your heart to be loved by Him as you are. He will do the rest.

From St. Teresa of Calcutta’s “Varanasi Letter” in Joseph Lanford, *Mother Teresa’s Secret Fire* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 54-55.