

August 9, 2026—19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

There are many good Catholic podcasters these days who interview converts to the Catholic faith. They often tell very inspiring stories about their journey; I like to listen to them while driving. Sometimes they were baptized as Catholics but left the faith but eventually made it back home; others came from Protestant or evangelical backgrounds who believed in Jesus and the Bible, but little by little struggled with doctrines and found the truth of the Catholic faith.

As you know, many Christian denominations teach that if you say the sinner's prayer and commit your life to Jesus that that is enough to be saved. Many sincere people make that decision, start reading the Bible and really do change their lives. That is a step for many converts; they began to consider Jesus seriously for the first time in their lives. A common doctrine for them, is "**once saved, always saved**". With that initial commitment, there is nothing left to do in one's spiritual life—you are certainly going to heaven. Some even say that you could commit a most serious sin, like murder, but still go to heaven.

As Catholics, we believe that conversion to Jesus is not a one-time event. Yes, there may be an initial point when a person commits his life to Christ and there can be other events like that in one's life. We might use the term on-going conversion. Many of those who were fallen away Catholics say that they didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ while growing up in the Church. But is that surprising? We aren't born with the knowledge of what it takes to have a loving relationship with God or even with other people. How many teenagers don't know how to love their parents, much less God! It takes good examples, self-knowledge and the experiences of life to develop loving, wholesome relationships.

Last week, I mentioned that I would like to reflect on developing our relationship with God through prayer; it's never too late to develop a deeper relationship. In our Catholic tradition we have the writings of the greatest saints who reached the height of prayer, like St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. Back in the 1960's and 70's it became popular to turn to Eastern religions to learn how to pray, particularly what we call mental prayer or the prayer of meditation. They advocated things like mindlessly repeating a word or sound to clear your mind of all thoughts. You needed certain positions like sitting cross-legged in a Yoga pose. Christian prayer doesn't depend on methods like that because for us prayer is simple; it is conversation with God. We talk to Him as one speaks with a father or

a friend. We can sit or kneel or stand, probably lying down is not so good! Unless you are sick, of course.

It is helpful to find a quiet place to pray; in the Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the best, but it can be anywhere. The First Reading told us about the prayer of the great prophet Elijah. He fled into the desert to escape the hatred of the wicked queen Jezabel; exhausted, sitting under a broom tree, he despaired of his life. God sent him food of bread and water, and it gave him such strength that he walked 40 days and 40 nights to Mount Horeb. This foreshadowed the Holy Eucharist and its spiritual power. Elijah was told that he would meet God on the mountain. He was used to spectacular miracles and presumed that the Almighty would come to him through things like the firestorm or the earthquake that hit the mountain while he was in a cave waiting. Instead, God's Presence came in a breeze that was like **"a still small voice"**. God can break through our sin and the noise of the world, but most of the time He wants us to be quiet and listen to His still small voice. There, in the quiet of our souls He speaks to us. If we are serious about prayer, we will provide that quiet space for Him.

The Gospel told us that after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, Jesus dismissed the crowds and even His disciples, and **"went up on the mountain by Himself to pray"**. In His humanity, He too, needed quiet time to talk to His Father God. Cardinal Sarah is an African Cardinal who wrote a book titled, The Power of Silence. He wrote about a habit of prayer when he was a priest and bishop in Africa. Once a month, he would go into the jungle alone for 24 hours and fast and pray. He is a very holy man and his commitment to prayer is an inspiration for the whole Church.

Jesus wasn't finished with His prayer until very early in the morning, just before dawn. The apostles were far across the sea when He appeared to them walking on the water. It was so startling that they thought they were seeing a ghost. He called out to them, **"Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid."** Only Peter would to this, he boldly asked Jesus if he could walk on the water to meet Him! He does for a few steps, but then fear overtakes him, he takes his eyes off Jesus and he begins to sink like a rock. This is one of the things that defeats our attempts to grow in prayer and our friendship with God. It keeps us mediocre and lukewarm.

If we don't commit to a time of prayer each day and stick to it, we will sink into the water. We must keep seeking the Lord without taking our eyes off Him. There are days when prayer is dry and feels like a waste of time; we can find every

excuse not to pray and do other things. We miss one day, which turns into two and then into weeks. In prayer, we encounter the living God who loves us and wants to deepen our friendship with Him. Step out on the water of prayer, **“Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid”**, Jesus tells us.