

Find time to talk to God

“In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there.”

Imagine, if you can, living with Jesus like the early disciples in a fishing village called

Capernaum. You wake up and walk with him. It's a bit chilly.

You reach the outskirts of the village and keep walking. It's still dark, long before dawn.

You walk far enough to be totally alone. Alone with God.

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That's how Jesus liked to begin the day. We don't know if he did it every day. The biblical texts show him at prayer frequently. But there were times when he simply never went to bed. "He went out into the hills to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God."

We do well to gather in church on Sundays. The *Letter to the Hebrews* urges us: "Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage each other to go." And yet, our Lord was just as keen on private prayer, both in the way he lived and in the advice he gave: "But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place."

Are you one of those who want to pray but don't know how? I won't tell you it's easy. It's easier to chat on the phone, surf the net and poke your friends on Facebook. It's easier to watch television or listen to the radio. To pray you have to force to yourself leave all that behind. You have to stop all the running around, sit down and tell Jesus, "Let's talk."

If I may take a page from the Gospel, do it early in the morning. Any time is a good time. So feel free. But if you never manage to stop for prayer, start early.

Turning off the noise and shutting out distractions is 90 percent of the battle. If you can just tell Jesus, "Let's talk", you have already started to pray. Tell him anything, literally anything, you want to say. Tell him you're happy because... or you're sad because... No need to pray like an angel. (You're not an angel, so no use

pretending.) Talk to Jesus the same way you would talk to anybody you know: friends, relatives, colleagues.

Perhaps you're afraid of prayer because you're a sinner. Well, we're all sinners. Besides, you're precisely the kind of person Jesus liked to spend time with. "I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners" was the reply he gave the Pharisees in the house of a tax collector. He enjoyed talking with Matthew. He'll also enjoy talking to you.

This article by Fr. Joe Babendreier first appeared in the Sunday Nation in August 2010.