

## Some Questions for Young People

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This past July I preached the nine-day novena of masses in preparation for the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel on July 16 at the monastery of the Carmelite nuns in Little Rock, AR. Each night a different parish in the city took responsibility for the liturgy, providing music, altar servers, lectors, etc. The pastor of that parish then presided. And, of course, as homilist for the novena I preached throughout.

The novena began on Saturday, July 8. The next day, Sunday, was organized as a youth night, with young people—teenage, college age—from, in this case, across the diocese, serving at the liturgy. Thus, as preacher I needed to say something directed to youth people.

I have little occasion to preach to youth. So, I felt insecure and questioned whether I had much to say to them. Also, it is my feeling that young people in particular need to feel listened to before they are ready to open their ears and hearts to what some adult thinks is important for them to hear.

Thus, for my homily that night I prepared a list of questions. It was an effort to try to get them to think for themselves in ways or about things they've perhaps never thought about before. In other words, it was my way of trying to engage them inwardly and personally without embarrassing anyone, as priests often risk doing whenever they ask questions during a homily and expect or solicit answers back.

After mass some people who attended—in this case, older adults—asked for a copy of my questions. Two worked in youth ministry. One was the youth ministry director for the diocese. I told them that I planned eventually to type them up and have them posted on our provincial website. [They could get a copy here.](#)

So, here they are, my questions for young people. Maybe some of you will find them pertinent for yourself, no matter what your age. You're free to use them as you wish.

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### (i) Your Prayer Life

- Can you sit still, keep quiet, be alone, do nothing, for some short stretch of time? For 5 minutes? 3 minutes? 2 minutes? Are you sure? Have you tried?
- Do you like to pray? If not, why not? If yes, are you able to pray regularly? If no, why? When you pray, do you talk to God? Or do you listen? Do you ever meditate? How?
- When you pray, is God near? Or is he far away? Is it easy or hard for you to get his attention?
- If God is near, is he there beside you? Or before you? All around you? Inside you? Inside your thoughts? Your heart?
- Is God present to you as love? As judgment? Righteousness? Guilt? Forgiveness? Is he present as peace? Or as doubt, confusion, anxiety?
- When God is with you, do you feel joy? Sorrow? Remember old hurts? Experience healing? Think about past failures? Regrets? Feel hope and promise?
- Is it God who is present to you when you pray? Or specifically Jesus? What about the Father? The Holy Spirit?

- If it is God, generally speaking, who is present in your prayer, is he there as your creator? As overseer of providence in your life? The eternal foundation of all that is?
- If Jesus is with you in prayer, is he there as a friend? A companion? Teacher? Master and lord?
- Is Jesus there as someone who loves you? As he who has saved you? Who wants only your good? Is he like a parent? A coach? A friend? Or an adult you respect and admire?

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### (2) Care of your Soul

- Where do you find beauty in your life? What about holiness? The sacred? Before what or whom do you feel reverence?
- How do you experience grace in your life? Is your life a gift? What about the unique person you are? Is simply being alive a marvel to you? Is your life a mystery? A miracle?
- Do you see yourself as a generous person? How so? What about gratitude? About what or for what are you especially grateful? Why?
- Do you feel that life is good? Are you happy to be alive? Do you feel good about the human race? Do you delight in being human? In human fellowship? Human love?
- Are you glad that you have a mind? Do you nurture it? Do you delight in having an imagination? Do you nurture it? A conscience? Do you try to form it?
- Is truth important to you? Is morality? The common good? What about art? Worship? Do you want to be a holy person? Do you work at it?
- Are you eager to do something that will make the world a better place? What is your goal in life? Your highest hopes?

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### (3) Living in the World

- Do you ever feel down or get depressed about your future? Or are you pretty confident? What about the future of our society? Of the human race? The planet?
- Does the possibility of great change in our world scare you? Or does it inspire you? Does it give you hope? Do you think about it at all?
- Do you believe that change is inevitable? Or do you feel that everything more or less always stays the same?
- Are you positive about the possibility of our world, our nation, our society, being able to make the changes it needs in order to protect life on our planet?
- Do you feel you belong somewhere in this world? To whom? To what? To your family? To your friends? A group of some kind?
- Do you feel you are part of your generation? Do you fit in? Or are you always an outsider in this world?
- What about our nation? Are you proudly American? Or are you first and foremost part of some other people? Do you feel at home anywhere in this world? Where?
- Do you feel a spiritual connection with the human race? With all creation? What does having such a connection mean to you, if anything?

- Does the cosmos in its vastness intimidate you? Does it inspire you? Does it lift you up to feelings of wonder? Or depress you with feelings of littleness? Insignificance?