



Conversing with your friend, the Lord God

From the syndicated column “The Prayerful Heart”

By Julie McCarty

It was just another ordinary reading period in Mrs. Grell’s first grade class at St. Mary’s School. As I observed her class, some students were reading aloud in a circle with the teacher. Other little minds were also hard at work, doing written assignments at their desks or hands-on activities at learning centers scattered around the perimeter of the room.

In a sunny nook near the window, a child was speaking in enthusiastic low tones into an old telephone that I knew was not connected to any phone service. After he finished, other students took turns, one by one, eagerly chatting away.

When the children went out for recess, I commented to Mrs. Grell how cute they were pretending to talk on the phone.

“Oh, they’re not pretending,” she insisted, with a coy smile on her face. “That’s the phone they use to call God.”

Mrs. Grell explained that she wanted the children to grow up knowing they could tell God *anything*—and the phone was one way to accomplish this end. When you are worried, she told them, you can tell God what you are worried about. When you are having a wonderful day, talk with God about it. Even if there is something you feel you can’t tell your mommy or daddy, you can still confide in God. I was particularly moved with how Mrs. Grell handled the upset of the class on a day when the name-calling, pushing each other, and tattling got out of hand on the playground. After discussing together what happened, she would gently but firmly suggest that the children slip over to the phone sometime in the afternoon to tell God what happened and what they might do differently next time.

I suspect many of us adult Catholics might learn something from the spontaneity and simple trust of these first-graders. Often we are afraid to let God know our true feelings. Will God really love us if we reveal our deeper side? Is it crazy to talk freely to God? Or somehow disrespectful?

The struggle to speak openly and honestly with God is not a new one. In the eighteenth century, St. Alphonsus de Liguori wrote a short work addressing this problem. In “A Way of Conversing Continually with God as with a Friend,” St. Alphonsus insists that although God is “infinite majesty,” it is nevertheless God’s desire that we approach him with the familiarity we would use when talking with a treasured friend. We can do this because of God’s great love for us. “Consider that you have neither friend nor brother, not father or mother, spouse or lover who loves you more than God does,” he writes.

St. Alphonsus reminds us that God dwells in the depths of our hearts. We are to develop our prayer life by talking to God within ourselves during the course of the day in the same way we would talk to a friend. When good things are happening, tell God of your gratefulness. When you see someone suffering, bring their needs before God in that moment. Each time you begin any task, offer it to God and

pray for his guidance. When you are lying awake at night, he says, remember that God is a close to you as your pillow.

No topic is off limits with God. Do not hesitate to tell God of your sufferings from illness, temptation, persecution, or other problems. If you feel at the end of your rope, St. Alphonsus says it does no harm to gently complain to God, asking for assistance. When you fall into sin, do not hang back, but rather immediately run to God, asking for forgiveness, and trusting in divine mercy.

Finally, St. Alphonsus says it is a big mistake to “enter God’s presence like a slave who, ashamed and full of fear, comes trembling with terror into the presence of a prince.” God desires we come to him with confidence and an open heart—in short, like the trusting, un-self-conscious first-graders in Mrs. Grell’s class.

