

On vacation this summer a priest friend told me about Antonia Meo, whom I had never heard of before. Her nickname was “Nennolina.” She was born in Italy in 1930 to a good Catholic family. When she was five a cancerous tumor appeared on her knee. Her leg was amputated, but she started school with a prosthetic leg. She died when she was only six, but Nennolina was declared “Venerable” by Pope Benedict XVI and may be on her way to canonization.

I mention Nennolina today because of her personal relationship with Jesus and the means by which that was formed. The nuns at her school witnessed her running into church before recess to say to Jesus in the tabernacle, “Jesus, come out and play with me.” She was very conscious of Jesus’ presence with her. This was especially clear from her letters to Christ.

Each night Nennolina wrote a letter to Jesus. At first, she had to dictate the letters to her Mother because she didn’t know how to write. Her first letter went: “Dear Jesus, today I’m going to my nuns to tell

them I want to make my First Communion at Christmas. Jesus soon come into my heart and I'll hug you very tight and kiss you. O Jesus I want you to stay forever in my heart." She made her first communion early because of the cancer. That day she wrote in her letter, "Dear Jesus Eucharist I am so very very happy that you have come into my heart. Never leave my heart. Stay forever and ever with me." In her letters, little notes really, she told Jesus everything. In one she told Jesus she had learned how to make the letter "O" that day and would soon be writing Him herself. And she did. Her letters are repetitive with many misspellings, but they have a spiritual maturity beyond her years that reveal the growth of a soul in love with Jesus.

"What shall I do?" So asks the Dishonest Steward. This seems like a tough parable to understand. But when Jesus praises the Steward Jesus isn't praising his dishonesty, but that fact that he was decisive and took action to address his crisis. Jesus wants us to be just as dynamic and creative in our own relationship with Him, as others are about

money. I have many times preached about the need for us to set aside time each day for prayer – my 20 minutes. Two things stop us from doing that. First, we don't prioritize our lives to open up that space for prayer. But, second, we don't know what to do in prayer. Our minds wander and it seems nothing is happening. We don't know how to communicate with Jesus even if we find the time.

Here I want to go back to Nennolina because Jesus tells us to become like little children. What about trying her method to live out a real prayer life with Jesus? Physically write a letter to Jesus each day. They don't have to be long or stylistically perfect. Nennolina's weren't. You could write them in a diary-type book.

“What shall I do?” Remember that decisive steward. The biggest problem in the spiritual life is getting started, just doing anything at all. This form of letter-writing as a way to learn how to pray to Jesus is doing something at least. We're in crisis – just like the steward. We're facing judgement and need Jesus, but we keep failing in our attempts

to connect with Him, because we make prayer too complicated. Instead, think like a six-year-old. Do you ever envy those people who seem to be able to pray spontaneously? Nothing scares a typical Catholic like being asked to offer up a prayer on the spot. (“Can’t I just say an Our Father?”). This way of Nennolina’s opens you up to learning how to do that. You will get used to thinking of Jesus as someone with whom you talk to and tell things. That’s what prayer is!

“What shall I do?” Maybe you already have a great prayer life. Wonderful. But if not, try writing short letters to Jesus. We must do something to reach out to Him. We’re all dying just like Nennolina. If she reached great closeness to God by age 6, we could do that too.