

The Christian spiritual life is associated with prayer, devotions, and the sacraments. Those practices matter, but Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium* that an authentic encounter with God cannot remain locked inside private spirituality. Real spiritual growth shows itself in an outward direction. Love of God becomes visible through love of neighbor. Faith and life belong together, and the neighbor becomes a real place of meeting Christ. Practices like Eucharistic adoration, Scripture reflection, and Sunday Mass give us a space to listen, repent, and be formed. They shape our heart, not only by offering comfort, but by teaching a person how to see and love. The Eucharist stands at the center of life, because it is communion with Christ himself. Yet authentic piety cannot remain only personal. If prayer never affects how someone treats others, then it becomes a spiritual routine rather than Christian conversion.

A true Christian prayer changes the way a person thinks and responds. In adoration or quiet Scripture reading, the Word of God does not simply inform our mind, it redirects our hearts. It becomes harder to treat suffering as someone else's problem when prayer trains the believer to look at the world with Christ's eyes. Prayer can become the place where God reveals concrete needs in the community and calls the believer to action. In my own ministry with young adults, this matters because spiritual practices should lead to real accompaniment, listening, and service, not only religious activity. The Eucharist deepens this outward movement. The Mass is not only about my relationship with God, it forms a people. Receiving the Body of Christ unites believers to Christ and to one another, and it also sends them into mission. If the Eucharist forms the Church as one body, then the needs of the community become the concern of everyone. In this way, worship and daily life are meant to stay connected.

Matthew provides a clear biblical foundation for this connection. In the scene of the final judgment, Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, sick, and imprisoned. The central question is whether people recognized him in concrete human need. The passage teaches that service is not simply moral kindness. It is a direct encounter with Christ. When a believer feeds, welcomes, visits, or cares for someone in need, that person is not only helping a neighbor, they are meeting Jesus himself.

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This also challenges any separation between what is believed and what is lived. What I claim to believe must show up in how I respond to people who are vulnerable.

This Gospel has particular relevance in Mississippi, especially in the Jackson area and surrounding rural communities. The region faces challenges such as poverty, limited transportation, and lack of access to resources. Jackson itself experiences significant economic hardship, and rural areas often face even greater isolation, including limited broadband access that affects education, employment, and communication. These conditions shape the experiences of many young adults, who may feel disconnected and unsupported. The pastoral reality is further shaped by the Diocese of Jackson, which spans 65 counties and serves a widely dispersed Catholic population through parishes and missions. Because of this geographic and social context, young adult ministry requires intentional outreach, strong relationships, and sustainable structures to help young people remain connected to faith and community.

This is why the link between prayer and service matters so much. In adoration and Scripture reflection, Christ forms the heart, but he also calls the believer outward. Matthew makes that call specific. Christ is present in the needs of others, including the needs of young adults who feel disconnected, unsupported, or spiritually alone. A Concrete personal and pastoral step for this week. My long term goal is to develop resources and structures that help young adult groups begin and continue in rural areas. A practical step I can take this week is to reach out to diocesan contacts and local parish leaders to introduce myself, ask where young adults are most in need, and seek guidance or collaboration. This small act turns prayer into mission. It is the beginning of building relationships that can support real pastoral accompaniment over time.

Faith becomes authentic when it moves. Prayer opens the heart, the Eucharist forms a people, and the Gospel sends disciples to recognize Christ in real human need. In that movement, the believer discovers that the neighbor is not separate from encountering God, but one of the clearest places where God can be found.