Introduction

As I go around the country preaching at parish retreats, I find that people yearn for God’s intimacy. One woman put it this way, “We need to understand God, but even more, we need to touch him.”

They long to hear his whisper, to hear him talk to them one-to-one, just as he talked to the early disciples. This is why I, assisted by Fr. Angelo Arrando, wrote Letters from Jesus.

What inspired me to write this book?

The roots of this book go back to my childhood and my early adult years, when Jesus’ presence helped me reclaim my life.

I grew up in a poor cotton mill neighborhood in Columbus, Georgia. There was so much love in my life, I didn’t notice that we were poor. My parents loved me, my grandparents loved me, my aunts and uncles loved me. Love surrounded me. However, that love was not enough. I suffered from a hidden disability that wasn’t fully diagnosed until I was an adult: right-hemisphere brain damage. This condition, probably from an injury that took place at birth, greatly affected the visual-spatial side of my life. Simple routines such as dressing and brushing my teeth presented major challenges to me.

The verbal side of my brain worked fine. In school, I read well ahead of my class level. However, the ordinary motor skills were
impaired to some extent. My handwriting was illegible and messy. Moreover, my disability left me with a short attention span.

My teachers and peers didn’t understand what was wrong with me. At times, some of my peers teased me unmercifully. Like many around me, I blamed myself. In junior high, one teacher told me, “Eddie, you are no good at all. You never will be any good.”

My grades plummeted. I felt truly lost and worthless. If I would never be any good at all, what hope was there for me?

During unsettled periods in my life, when my disability exasperated me and held me back, many times I felt the presence of Jesus glide into my soul. His love came like a warm, caring light that could be seen only with the heart. In the silence of those times, he hushed my anxiety. “I am with you,” he whispered to me in the stillness. “Let my hand touch you.”

After those encounters, from time to time, I would begin to “journal” as though Jesus were speaking to me. Often, before leading retreats or conferences, I would sink into the stillness of God’s love and pray, “Dear Jesus, what do you want me to say today?” Then I would write out what I thought Jesus was saying to me about the talk or sermon. I would translate that into the third person and preach it to the audience. It proved to be a very effective way of reaching people with God’s love.

A guide and inspiration for me was a book I read in my college years—the fifteenth-century classic The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis. It is loved by countless Christians—Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox alike. Large parts of Imitation include fresh words from Jesus. In those words, I felt Jesus visiting my heart, conveying his love, letting me know that he wanted to speak to me in the silences.

One passage in particular meant the world to me. It said, “My son, hear my words, for they are exceptionally sweet and surpass those of the philosophers and wise men of the world. They are to be listened to in silence and received with all humility and deep love. From the beginning I have instructed the prophets, and even now I do not cease to speak.”
The truth is, God speaks to us all. You don’t have to have the word “saint” before your name to hear God speaking. He calls us all to a mighty dialogue with him. We listen through the Scriptures, we listen to the Spirit of God within us, and we listen to him through our brothers and sisters in Christ who form the Church, his body.

On this side of glory, we hear his voice only partially, imperfectly. As Paul says, we comprehend God as though we were looking “through a mirror dimly.” Nevertheless, we hear him even still, even now.

We hear God’s voice in the calm and quiet, as did the prophet Elijah. God commanded Elijah to stand on Mount Horeb as he passed by. A mighty wind split the mountains. An earthquake broke the rock. A flame blazed. However, God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the flame. Rather, he was in “a sound of sheer silence,” the Bible says. Moreover, it was in this hush, “the still small voice,” that God whispered to Elijah.

This story reminds us that God speaks to us more often in the loving silences than in dramatic experiences. “Be still,” the psalmist tells us, “and know that I am God.” The words of these letters from Jesus come out of those tender silences and, as you read them, call you into the same tender silences where you can hear God speaking in the bosom of your soul.

Evelyn Underhill compared many Christians to nearly deaf people attending a concert. They read the program and believe every word of it, but can only catch a phrase of the music now and then. Too often, Christians have no idea of the mighty symphony that fills the universe. This book is intended to help us all open the ears of our souls and catch God’s mighty symphony in all its fullness.

How to read this book

This book is not a special “hotline” to God that replaces Scripture. This is not a supernatural revelation straight from heaven. We simply
offer *Letters from Jesus* as a way of allowing you the luxury of learning to hear the whispers of God.

Consisting of twenty-one “letters from Jesus,” *Letters from Jesus* has been crafted in an established devotional form of writing, in which the first-person voice of Jesus (or the Father) speaks directly and intimately to you as you read. A passage from Scripture follows each letter.

Each short letter stands on its own, and can be easily read in one short sitting. While much can be gained if you start from the first letter and read in sequence to the end, the topic titles also allow you to skip around and choose the topic that most meets the needs of a particular day. The book can be used as a daily devotional guide, a resource for a twenty-one-day retreat, or a special help to keep near in times of need.

Written in vivid, poetic imagery, these words of Jesus stir not only the superficial but also the vital depths of being. This genre of spiritual writing is meant to lead you on a powerful journey into the love of God. It can capture afresh the humanity of Jesus as almost no other genre can. You may well find that Jesus’ words can awe and enliven you, and knit you back together again as you linger with him.

These letters can intensely affect people. When I began creating the letters, I read a paraphrased version of one of them to large crowds of people during Masses I preached at my home parish, St. Anne, in Columbus, Georgia. Those readings riveted the congregation. Many eyes shone with tears. In the reception line afterward, many people told me how powerfully the words affected them. Our director of religious education asked for a copy of the sermon, which she plans to read to teenagers each year as part of their confirmation preparation.

The day after hearing the sermon, a middle-aged father called me, his voice breaking, saying that hearing those words had been life-altering for him. As you read *Letters from Jesus: Experiencing the Depth of His Love*, you may well experience the same.