

HEARING GOD, PART 3



And God said... "Can you hear me now?"

As a priest, I am often asked, "How did you get the 'calling'?" My answer is usually something like, "That's a long story." But the short version is; I never heard a voice, I did not hear rushing winds or peals of thunder. In reality the calling came through a collection of persons and events that God used to gently guide me and lead me on. Prayer was the "cell phone" that I used to hear His voice in all these events.

As prayer increases our sensitivity to God's word, we are able to hear Him in many ways. It may happen at Mass as we find ourselves minding our own business, very comfortable in our pew; when suddenly Father begins to say something that makes us wonder if he was told exactly what we needed to hear! Perhaps we have been awe-struck by a certain prayer that really spoke to our heart as it was read. I have known God to speak through priests, parents, and even, yes, children! If we are open and honest with Him, His voice will get through to us.

When I first began feeling the "calling", I asked a priest what I had to do to become a priest. He said that I had to have a college degree. I told him that my high school grades were terrible, (barely 2.0) and I never took SAT's. He said, "If God wants you to be a priest, he will get you into a college." So I told God, "If you want me to be a priest, you have to get me into a college." Then I applied to one school and to my surprise, the Dean of Admissions at St. A's said I was accepted for studies. This barely "c" student received a BA after four years which left little doubt in my mind what God was saying!

"OK, I am ready to hear, but how do I know if it is really God speaking to me?" I propose four pillars of discernment for testing what you are hearing. Scripture and Church teaching are the two primary pillars. What we hear in prayer should not contradict Scripture. As Scripture is God's Word, He would not make private statements to us that conflict with His definitive Word. We may also take care to guide our understanding of Scripture according to the Church teaching. Since The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, God would not speak contrary to Himself as revealed in Church Teaching. Therefore, adding The Catechism of the Church to our personal library may be very helpful in discerning God's voice in prayer. It has a marvelous index and is very useful in giving clear knowledge and insight for direct answers and guidance.

A more personal pillar is the consistency between God's Word and our life history. It is not likely that God would tell us something that is inconsistent with a vocational calling. If prayer brings us to question our vocation, or seems to upset our conscience, it should be carefully discussed with a confessor or a trusted person whom we know is well rooted in the faith.

Finally, the sacrament of reconciliation is an excellent pillar of discernment. For as our personal relationship with Christ grows and we become more intimate with Him, we become more conscious about Truth. We see more clearly the truth about God and about ourselves. Sorting out the truth from the lies often requires the help of a good confessor who is used by God our Loving Father provide us with His voice of healing, mercy and forgiveness.

Once a very humble person told me, "Father, I am so *thick* that God could never get through to me. I don't think I should bother trying to hear Him." No doubt, this is an objection to which many could relate. To answer it, I refer to Numbers 22:22-35. It is a story about how God used a donkey to prophesy! The crux of the passage is simply; if God can speak through an ass... He can surly get through to YOU! Indeed, no matter how thick and stubborn we believe we are, He will get through to any person who is prayerfully honest and open His will!

While there have been thousands of books written on the subject of prayer there are some basic principles will spark your prayer life. Much of my material will be rooted in a wonderful book that is no longer published, Appointment With God, Fr. Michael Scanlan, T.O.R (Franciscan University Press). It is one of the best books I have seen for outlining and forming a life of prayer. If you can find a copy via the internet it will make a great resource for your spiritual life of prayer.

....Fr. Moe