

The Ability to Listen

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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It was the middle of the night and he couldn't sleep. He had put everything he could into trying to do the right thing in recent months. Even though he tried, he wasn't getting anywhere. In fact, some people were really upset with him and threaten his family. So, he went to his kitchen, made a pot of coffee, put his head in his hands, and sat at his kitchen table crying. Out of frustration, he said to himself, "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what is right. But Lord I must confess that I'm weak now. I'm afraid...I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left."

Perhaps we can relate to this experience of feeling defeated. We try so hard to follow our conscience, make many personal sacrifices, seek the greater good, lose friends, and feel like we failed. In these moments, even if we are not very religious, we turn to God and start listening.

After expressing his emptiness and opening himself up to listening, this same man heard the voice of God say something very important and life changing to him. God said, "Martin Luther [King], stand up for righteousness, stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you, even until the end of the world."

Monday, we celebrate and remember the civil rights activist Martin Luther King. Not only was he an activist, he was also a deeply committed Christian. In the name of God, he courageously called out

the evils of racism, war, and economic injustice. God is the one who told him to stand up for righteousness, justice, and truth. God was the one who told him that he supported him. It was due to his ability to listen to God that he was able to remain true to his Christian calling until the end of his life some twelve years later.

In today's First Reading, Samuel was also called by the Lord in the middle of the night. After thinking it was his mentor, Eli, he finally realized it was God. When he realized what was happening, he immediately stopped and responded, "speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'

While we can never know for sure exactly what God is saying to us personally, one of the indicators that we are listening to God is if we are able to remain true to what we believe over long periods of time. Human initiative and even human stubbornness can only get us so far. Listening to the voice of God, however, is sustaining. It sustains us into eternity.

The ability to listen is what sustains us on our faith journey.

Am I worn out and frustrated? If so, perhaps we aren't listening to God. Scripture says that those who hope in God will be renewed in strength and not become faint or grow weary.

As tensions run high in our world, church, and community, let us pray that even if we cannot be in agreement on issues, policies, or politics, we can all be in agreement on the desire to grow in our ability to listen. 'Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.'