

Have you noticed the differences in our church and our worship for Lent?

It's hard to miss all the purple, which is the color for Lent.

And then there is our church environment which is more stark and bare than usual - you won't see any flowers until Easter.

SCREEN: Alleluia

There is one word we don't say or sing during Lent.

It's this word.

Shhh... don't say it until Easter.

(If your child attends SLAM, they know you don't say this word!)

Another change we made at our Masses with music is we cut out the second communion hymn for Lent.

We did this to build some extra quiet time into our worship.

When we started this last weekend I could sense some uncomfortableness in the congregation, some uneasiness, people murmuring,

"Why is it so quiet right now, why aren't we singing?"

We get so used to there always being noise...even joyful noise...

that when there isn't any, we don't know what to do.

And I'm not just talking about church, but life in general.

We've all seen people who always have headphones on or earbuds in.

Some people always need to have the TV on.

Others have to have music or talk radio or conversation while they're driving.

Experts say there are huge benefits to having some silence in the course of the day.... to have a break from the constant noise.

Intentional silence lowers stress and tension and anxiety, resulting in better physical, emotional and spiritual health.

SCREEN: Spring Cleaning main screen

This is week two of our Lenten message series titled, Spring Cleaning.

Lent is a time when we are being told to do some spiritual Spring cleaning - to clear out whatever is cluttering up our souls -

like bad habits or attitudes or practices, so we can

'return to God with our whole hearts'.

And one way we can do that is by turning off the noise in our lives

so we can listen to God.

In the readings today, some people heard the voice of God

and it completely changed their lives.

We should all follow their example.

In our first reading from the Old Testament,

we met Abram, who later changed his name to Abraham.

He is the father, the patriarch of the Jewish people.

And today we heard that one day God appeared to him and said,

"Abram, I want you to go forth from the land where you are living, the land of your kinsfolk, to a new land that I will show you."

Now, you should know that Abram was 75 years old when God said this.

His life was settled, he had a nice, comfortable routine.

Why would he even consider moving someplace new?

Well, here's why. God said this to Abram:

SCREEN: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you;

I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.

All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you." -Genesis 12

Abram could have said 'no'; he could have objected, argued, offered excuses

- we might have.

But he didn't.

Abram said "yes".

And because he was open to the voice of God,

Abram's life became a source of blessing to his family,

to the Jewish people and to the whole world, including us!

All because he heard the Lord speaking loudly and clearly.

In the Gospel today, God had something to say to Jesus's followers.

So to set the scene, Jesus took three of his apostles - Peter, James and John - up a high mountain by themselves.

Now, getting away to pray is something Jesus did often.

He'd step away from the crowds, the noise, the busyness to clear out the clutter and spend time in conversation with his heavenly Father. And while they were on the mountain the Transfiguration occurred.

We heard that Jesus's face shone like the sun, that his clothes became as white as light and that two biblical figures, Moses and Elijah, appeared.

Peter was so overwhelmed by all of this that his reaction was, *Let's put up some tents so we can stay here. Let's never leave!*

It got even better and more miraculous.

A bright cloud appeared and a voice spoke from the cloud:

SCREEN: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Then the cloud disappeared, Moses and Elijah departed, and Jesus said it was time to go back down.

Now by this point in their journey with Jesus, the Apostles had already seen and heard some pretty incredible things: people healed, multitudes miraculously fed, Jesus walking on water and casting out demons - they'd heard all his sermons and parables.

But with what they saw and heard on the mountain that day, there could be no more doubt in their minds about who they were following.

God the Father spoke from the cloud and declared,

Jesus is my son, listen to him.

This must have been completely mind blowing for Peter, James and John.

Not just hearing God's voice but confirming what they suspected and believed:

that Jesus was the one the Jewish people

had been waiting for since the time of Abraham.

And yet, the words God spoke were incredibly simple: *listen to him*.

Simple, but life changing advice: *listen to Jesus*.

This Lent we're being called to change our lives,

to be transfigured - in a sense - so we can be more like Jesus.

And one of the biggest things that can keep this from happening is

all the noise and distractions in our lives.

And unless we clear out the clutter, reduce the noise and distractions,

we can miss out on God speaking to us and making his will known.

You might be thinking, *"I'd love to hear God speaking to me,*

but isn't that something that only happens to people in the bible?

Or maybe to a few really religious people like priests and nuns?"

The answer is NO.

God wants to speak to all of us.

To hear God, we need to turn off the noise.

To get really practical, how do you do that?

Let me give you a few suggestions.

The first one is to use some of the time when you are in the car as quiet time.

Now, I don't commute to work, but in the past year,

I've been disciplining myself to not turn on the radio when I get in my car.

Every Wednesday I drive to my mom's.

It's 45 minutes each way.

I just enjoy the quiet and use the time to clear out the clutter in my mind

and to pray.

Try it when you are in the car.

Don't turn on the radio, don't spend all the time in conversation,

just listen to the silence and consider some time in prayer.

How about keeping the TV off while you are doing household chores or

working out at the gym?

I know some people who fast one day a week in Lent from all of their devices.

Others disconnect from social media for 40 days.

If you are going to succeed in turning off the noise so you can listen to God, you will need to be intentional about it, you'll need a plan.

One person told me that she has created a space in her home for her quiet time.

She has a comfortable chair, has her bible and spiritual reading there -

- that's being intention, being ready, having a plan.

Another way to turn off the noise to listen to God is

by using the takeaway for this series (**hold up**) which you can find at the exits.

This has a guide for Lent with scripture passages to read each day.

We refer to the Bible as the Word of God,

so if we are going to do as God commanded the Apostles on the mountaintop -

listen to the Lord - this is a perfect way to do this in Lent.

When I read scripture, I start with a prayer, a very simple one.

I pray, *"Lord, as I open your Word, please open my heart.*

Help me hear you clearly, to understand your message,

and to grow as a disciple of your Son."

As simple as that.

And when I begin with prayer, I find that a phrase or story I read

will catch my attention and give me some direction

for a problem I am dealing with.

Try it for yourself.

You'll grow in faith and become more like Jesus.

And the last way I'll mention to turn off the noise so you can listen to God

is something new we are offering called, *Tuesdays with Jesus*.

From 7pm-8:15 in the parish hall for the next three Tuesdays you

can hear and reflect on some stories about Jesus and

then discuss them with others.

Just 75 minutes on a Tuesday evening.

Rather than staying home, watching TV, surfing the internet or getting drawn into social media.....step away from your normal routine and spend some time with Jesus.

So three recommendations to help you tackle the spiritual Spring Cleaning wants for you this Lent:

add some silence into your day,

read God's Word, and attend *Tuesdays with Jesus*.

As I shared with you last week, experts say it takes 21 days for a new habit to stick.

There is still plenty of time for this Lent to be a great season of change for us.

And it begins when we turn off the noise and listen to Jesus. Amen. +