

Deacon Tom Homilies ©
Hearing God's Voice Day Two

TUESDAY 08/22/06

I started off this week yesterday with the topic of hearing God speaking to us in these days and times. I asked who among us has experienced God's word or will in a pretty certain manner? I also asked who has not had any comfort or feeling of knowing personal communication with the Good God...

And for those who were not here yesterday, we mentioned the clever, if not simplistic campaign of billboards across the country... they had short make-believe communications from God... Imagine a full-size highway sign with only these words: "YOU THINK IT'S HOT HERE?" Or another sign that made me smile: "BIG BANG THEORY – YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING." And each of these single-thought signs had the signature word GOD at the bottom.

Now, we Catholics believe in a God who speaks to us. Father Thomas Richstatter, a Franciscan says that Our God is not a silent, distant God, but a God who wants us to know who he is and who we are and what life is all about. We believe in a God who freely chooses to reveal his mysterious plan to create us, love us and take us to himself. We may not really understand how it happened, but Scripture tells us that God spoke to Abraham – the same God who spoke to the patriarchs and the prophets and who spoke his definitive word in Jesus Christ. And just what did God say? God's word's were most emphatic: An "I love you" in the birth, life, preaching, healing, passion, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Word of love that God speaks in the Bible demands more of us than "Yes, that's true." The Bible is essential to Catholicism. How can we say yes to Jesus, how can we be a disciple of Jesus unless we know Jesus? And to know Jesus we must know the Scriptures, for as St. Jerome said, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." The Scriptures are not a list of propositions to be believed. They are an encounter with a Person to be loved.

Father Richstatter says, " God has not appeared to me as he did to Abraham. I was not there by the Sea of Galilee with Peter and Andrew, James and John, when Jesus walked by and said, "Follow me." I wasn't knocked to the ground in a blaze of light like St. Paul. I received the faith quietly, gradually. My parents (and teachers, neighbors and friends) handed on the tradition they had received from their parents, spouses, teachers, friends. And the members of that former generation handed on what they had received from the generation before them, all the way back to the apostles. Even St. Paul says that he handed on what he had received.

Those who knew Jesus and witnessed his death and resurrection were commissioned to preach and make disciples. Some disciples handed on the message orally and some, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote down faith experience. Catholics treasure God's self-revelation in both its written and oral forms. Catholics cherish Scripture and Tradition. Both reveal the same Divine Mystery. Both bring us into contact with the living God.

And the word of the *living* God is a *living* word. When the lector or deacon or priest proclaims Scripture at Mass – it may be a human voice – perhaps even a most familiar voice we are hearing. But it is Christ who is present. It is Christ himself who speaks to us.

So for this second day of discussing... discovering... meditating upon God's voice in our lives.... We must first of all acknowledge Holy Scripture and the words of Jesus and the prophets and holy men and women found in Scripture. Again and again, the Bible finds the balance in forms of expressing God's words to us... between knowing and not knowing, between using words and having humility about words. To read the Bible well, we need to appreciate that Scripture speaks to us in various ways and forms. But for most of us in the contemporary West, it is an uphill struggle. We often prefer to read the Bible literally and to turn to it for precise answers to our questions. Recently, I started a quest to read Genesis. And in that book, one finds not one but two stories of creation... and you read that Noah was over six hundred years old when the flood was coming to an end... If I am going to be hung up on reading these as if they are an exact history book – I will forever be struggling uphill.

But they give me pause... and I ask God's help for the meaning... His meaning in and among these precious words and stories. Someone asked a Franciscan priest **how God speaks** in the Bible today. His reply? "I just try to hear one phrase... or one sentence, and I think... Many of you have may have heard of Lectio Divina – the quiet, prayerful, studied walk through brief Scripture passages... It is here that God speaks to us. Let us pray to want and be open to hearing God's voice in our lives.