

Thursday 08/24/06 Oh God Praise God

This week, my concentration has been on hearing God speak to us... in a certain and growing comfort knowing that the loving God has shared with us in one manner or another. I would guess most all of us are hopeful or intrigued by the idea of a more direct form of communication with God. One popular movie of 20 years ago (or so) was "O God." It starred George Burns and John Denver – George played God – a God that only John Denver could see and speak with. It was a delightful movie – do you remember it?

Few people actually hear God speaking to them in audible words. Perhaps none do so such that words could be captured in some way. But who is to say what God can or cannot do? They say there are a million stories in the big city.... And there are probably as many ways for us to listen to God as there are different people. Even though I spoke of minimizing the chatter around us -- it is perhaps possible that we can discern God's voice even in the events and interruptions of the day – even in the cacophony of TV news. I received a call from a parishioner who had been touched by a note. She felt God's voice in the timing of the receipt of the mail. It is also important to be sensitive to those moments when we feel strongly drawn to an experience of 'communion' with God. At those times we may need to set aside a period of silence and freedom from distractions, allowing us to listen more fully to the Spirit—or embrace God more lovingly in our heart's core. How can we listen better to God? In no way, of course, are the insights that I am about to share the only answers to this question.

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Very likely you have ideas and answers of your own. But to start with, what you would be willing to give... what would you be willing to do to hear God speaking to you? If you wanted to be absolutely certain that you would come to hear God's voice – would you be willing to give up one hour in the day? I borrow these four 15-minute ideas from Father Francis Martin – a contemplative Franciscan from Washington, D. C. He is a much-accomplished author, speaker, Biblical scholar and a holy teacher.

Say that you could come to the point of committing to an hour with the Lord... perhaps not all at once – but as a goal... one hour, try this. Go to where it is quiet and it is you and the Lord alone. The first thing you do for 15 minutes is... you praise God. All on your own... just praise the Lord. Read Psalms, or just as your heart moves you, praise Him for creation... for his mercy... for the work of redemption by Jesus, for your life... for your spouse and children and grandchildren... for Mary ever Virgin... just praise the Lord.

The second thing to do is repent of your sins. There – you ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you should repent. Go over your daily schedule from the day before. Who are the people you talked to and met with? What were your people-related actions of the day before? Ask God's light to come upon you to help you know where to repent of weakness and sin. And if you have no recollection of the day before – it is a sign of the busyness and lack-of recollected ness I talked about yesterday.

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The third thing is to get a word from the Lord. Pick up the Scriptures. Open to a page – any page. Or go to a favorite reading. Ask for a word from the Holy Spirit. Don't abandon the first word that comes to you because you don't get it... or you don't understand. Stick with it; ask God: "What does this mean? What do you want me to know about this?" For example – words like repentance... covenant... chosen... Ponder the word – and pray over it. And don't be uncomfortable to say to the Lord, "I don't understand this – why did you give me this word or these words like 'only begotten Son' or 'belly of the whale'?" Get a little notebook and save words and results.

And the fourth and final step: intercede for those who need help and healing and mercy and correction and forgiveness. For lapses by someone in the parish... for family members who have broken relations with you... for our friend Judy S. who is undergoing chemotherapy.... Fifteen minutes of interceding for others.

In this hour – God's voice will slowly and more predictably come to you... A voice may come upon you: "Judy is in my hands – and I love her more than you could ever know." So says the Lord in your mind. And you will share that with us – and like Ezekiel – we will hear you say, "Thus says the LORD!" And then we will know that the Lord has been speaking with us – and YOU have shared His voice with us! Awesome! Simply Awesome!