

## **2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time(B)**

*January 14, 2024*

Why do we hear some things better than others? My experience is that some sounds seem to get our attention almost immediately, while others seem to pass us by completely unnoticed. As one American child in the Bronx told me some time ago that he could hear the ice cream truck from a mile away, but if you asked him if an airplane had just flown overhead, he wouldn't have a clue.

How many of us would find ourselves daydreaming at school and not have a clue about what the teacher was saying until he or she called our name?

Yes, some sounds, some voices get our attention WAY more than others.

How come? Well, there are probably a whole bunch of reasons. Some are biological. In the case of parents and children, there is a survival aspect to it. Without it, a child's safety could be in jeopardy. But there are at least two others that seem rather obvious.

The first is attentiveness. We are much more likely to hear something if we are actively listening for it, actively paying attention at a high level whether that's hearing dozens of different instruments clearly while at an orchestral performance, or hearing the tiny (but annoying) sound of a cricket that is hiding somewhere in the house.

And another reason we hear some things better than others is habituation the "getting used to" certain sounds. If we hear a particular sound over and over and there aren't any real consequences that arise we tend to stop "hearing" the sound at all (not unlike people who live near train tracks). But if the sound really "matters", we tend to hear it every single time it occurs – whether it is loud and intrusive (like a siren) or soft and muted (like an idling car engine).

My dear friends, we just heard the story of Samuel and Eli in our First Reading. The story is almost comical in that Samuel keeps thinking that Eli is calling him, when in truth it is God who is calling him. Of course, we don't listen to this story just so we can be sort of amused by it. Nor do we listen to it just to get some information about the history of the Jewish people. No, this story is included in the Sacred Liturgy for a much more important reason - to get us to re-consider our own role in God's plan, our own role in cooperating with God's will, our own faithfulness to God's call.

And to be honest with you, it starts with listening. And my guess is, most of us probably don't feel that we are very good listeners when it comes to God. We just don't. In fact, most of us probably don't even know where to start, don't even know what "listening to God's voice" means. I'd like to say that I may have all the answers, but I can assure you, virtually all clergy struggle with the same things you do when it comes to faith. We wonder about the same things you wonder about. And so, if you feel that hearing God's voice is a challenge, nearly all of us feel exactly the same way.

So where do we start? Well, maybe a good place to start is with two things: attentiveness and habituation as I mentioned earlier. First, we'll never hear what God wants us to hear, whether he is whispering or shouting, if we aren't expecting him to communicate with us. And that takes faith.

Authentic faith. Deep faith. Do we truly believe that God has something to say to us, that God is truly trying to make himself known to us, that God is actively trying to move our hearts and minds in a particular direction, toward goodness and holiness, that is, down a path that ultimately leads to him? Or do we believe that God is silent, and that we have to try to figure everything out for ourselves? How we answer those questions makes all the difference in the world.

But if we do believe that God is trying to communicate with us, then how might we be attentive to his voice? Well, there are countless ways, but I'll mention a few. It starts with prayer. Not the "ask God for a laundry-list of

things” kind of prayer, but the kind in which we try to rest in God and allow him to come to us in the silence of our hearts. Letting our loving God speak first before we even utter a word is important, maybe crucial.

Another way we can remain attentive is by not dismissing some of the inner conflicts and disconnects we sometimes feel when we are making decisions or trying to figure something out. In other words, if you are choosing something or someone that makes you feel uneasy, makes you wonder if you are doing the right thing, the truth is, you probably aren't. That 'uneasiness' might just be God tapping you on the shoulder.

Or if several people in your life, whom you respect are all telling you the same thing or giving you the same advice, it might be wise not to dismiss their comments, but rather take them to heart. God might be using them to get to you.

God sometimes talks to us through our tears. And it all starts with attentiveness. Samuel wasn't expecting God to speak to him, so he couldn't recognize the voice.

Secondly, it's important to listen for God's voice not occasionally, but continually. That way it becomes a habit. And as we act on that voice within over and over again, we will come to learn the difference between the things of God and the things that aren't from God, the difference between the things we should pursue and the things that only lead to dead-ends or heartache or loneliness or selfishness. It is in the "practicing" of listening that we actually get better at it. That's habituation.

And I've saved one thing for last. And this one might be the biggest reason of all as to why we sometimes struggle to hear God's voice. And the reason is this: Maybe we don't REALLY want to hear what God has to say, we don't REALLY want to know what he is asking of us. That might be the most honest answer of all.

And why would we NOT want to hear God's voice? Because we know what he's going to say.

**“Come.”**

That's the crux of the whole matter. In the end, what Jesus wants most of all, is for us to simply follow him wherever he leads. And that is not an easy thing for it costs a lot. In fact, it costs us everything.

Can we have the wisdom to be attentive to God's voice? Can we be committed enough not to simply listen once in a while, but continually? And can we have the courage to accept God's invitation and follow where he leads?

It sounds a little scary, maybe even impossible. But, in faith, we know that can't be true. God's way is ALWAYS the best way. And so why not give it a try, not tomorrow or the next day or the day after that, but today.

Let's let God come to us in the silence. He has something important to tell us, something important to ask of us, something life-giving to reveal to us. And when we hear his voice, or even just think we might be hearing his voice, let's echo the words of Samuel, with faith and trust and courage, and say,

**“Speak, for your servant is listening.”**