

Lent is a Great Time to Listen to God and One Another

When I was in about fourth grade, I remember a popular book that I got for Christmas that year was "A Light in the Attic." It's a series of poems and drawings by Shel Silverstein.

One of the poems he wrote was called "Talking Tina and Deaf Donald." It was a series of words and drawings.

Talking Tina, as her name suggested, would talk continually. She liked Donald, but wasn't sure he liked her too. Throughout the poem, there are drawings of Deaf Donald signing "I love you" to her in return, but she is so busy talking nonstop that she can't take the time to read the signs. Eventually at the end of the poem, she walks away, not "hearing" anything that was said to her.

In real life sometimes I think we can all be a bit like Talking Tina. We talk a lot, often giving others advice, solicited and unsolicited; we ramble on on social media; and we pray talking to God quite a bit too.

Talking and communication are indeed good things. God wants to hear us. But in the Gospel we had from February 14th, Mark 7: 31-37, Jesus cures a man who is deaf. The first thing that happens though is he opens his ears; then once his ears are opened, he touches his tongue and he is able to speak.

In life it works the same way. The first thing we hear as we come into the world is the voices of our mother and father. We then react to sounds, and eventually learn how to speak. Growth in the spiritual life is very similar. But how often do we listen?

One great thing to work on in Lent as we begin the season this week is to try to hear God better, and coupled with that try to be a better listener of one another so we can truly help and not hinder growth in ourselves and one another.

With respect to God, try to find time for some silence in your life. Noise is all around us, and sometimes that can be hard to come by, but maybe you find time after everyone has gone to bed or early in the morning, go outside for a bit, or even stop by the church. We often see the mountains in the Gospel as places where people meet God, such as Mount Tabor where Jesus is Transfigured, or Mount Sinai, where Moses encounters God. Part of my love for nature photography is whether it's the mountains or just a short day trip here in Minnesota, it also gives me time to think and still my heart. I'll also sometimes do this at the church, and just go to the sanctuary when it's quiet. You can really feel God's presence and get clarity when we try to listen more closely to what He is telling us.

With respect to others, one of the things that is so important is to just listen. The "fixer" in us can want to make things right. But you typically can't get someone to start going to Mass again, to quite a bad habit, to make a lifestyle change, or to find peace about

something troubling them with a short conversation. Also telling people what to do might work when you have a three year old, but as people age wise parents know their children are not robots and have opinions of their own and learn to listen to them, and we do that for others too. The gift of time, of listening to what's on someone's mind, of trying to discern what other problems may be behind someone's grief or anger, and being empathetic by putting ourselves into their shoes can work wonders. There does come a time for advice, and it's important to also not fear challenging others to true growth, but this can only come after we hear the person and spend time with them.

Lastly, do we listen to ourselves? God gives us a great gift in an interior "Jiminy Cricket" called a conscience. It's important to form this conscience (perhaps the subject of another upcoming Lenten bulletin article) through prayer, good counsel from others, learning the faith, etc., but we also must listen to it too. Our conscience, if properly formed, can help us make right decisions, and challenge us to do difficult things, so don't ignore it because it's there for a reason.

As the Sprint formerly Verizon guy would say, "can you hear me now?" God says the same thing to us, but hearing His voice takes a bit of an effort. So tune Him in and find true spiritual growth in this sacred season.

God bless,

Fr. Paul