

Pray More Lenten Retreat - Transcript

Listening to and for God's Voice

Sr. Faustina

Hello. My name is Sister Faustina with the Sisters of Life, here to talk to you about listening to God's voice. And let's fittingly start with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. We praise You, Father, for the gift of Your life, Your love poured out for us generously. We ask [chk 0:25] for the grace to receive that, to recognize Your voice, and follow it. [Chk 0:31] courage and strength for the fullness of life that You desire. We ask all this in the intercession of Your Holy Mother and Your holy name, Jesus. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So back in 1968, Navy Chaplain Father O'Conner, who would later become Cardinal O'Conner of New York and the founder of the Sisters of Life, he was on a short flight in Virginia, back home where he lived, and it was a small military aircraft, just the pilot and himself. And even though the pilot was obviously flying the plane, he had in his cockpit all of the control panels as well. So the first hour, they took off, no difficulty, it was the evening. And then about an hour into the flight, complete darkness, and heavy turbulence as the rain beat down on him. And then, oh gosh, so sorry.

In 1968, a young Navy Chaplain, Father O'Conner, who would later become Cardinal O'Conner of New York and the founder of the Sisters of Life, he was on a short flight back in Virginia, back to the base where lived, and it was in a small military aircraft, just with the pilot and himself. And the pilot was flying it, but he also had the controls in his cockpit as well. So they took off in the evening, no difficulty, but then about an hour into the flight describes that complete darkness fell in the midst of a storm, and heavy turbulence, and the rain beat down on their flight, then they were encompassed in complete fog. And so it was a very eerie feeling, not knowing, you know, where... they couldn't see anything ahead of them.

And a few minutes into that they see a warning light on the plane that said they were running out of fuel. Another few minutes go by and a second warning that they were virtually out of fuel. At this point he's getting very nervous, and he radios up to the pilot and he says "Do you see the warnings?" And the pilot said "Yes, I see them, but I think we can make it." And then a few minutes later it became very evident that they wouldn't make it. They still had 50-75 miles to go.

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And so he radioed all the local airports - Dallas, Washington National, Baltimore - but none of them could take them because they were embanked with the fog as well. So Father O'Conner pulled rank, being much more senior than this young pilot, and said "You're going to have to call the International SOS, the distress signal to see if some local air field will take a chance on us. And so the young pilot said "Oh, I can't do that. That's going to leave a black mark on my record, because I took off without enough fuel." And Father O'Conner said "You will call the International SOS, because you're going to have far more than a black mark on your record. Not only could the 2 of us crash and be killed, but we don't even know what's below us, others that we could hurt."

And so he did, this young pilot did, I'll share the rest in Cardinal O'Conner's words, because he said what happened after that he will never forget. He says "No longer did the pilot call the International SOS than a voice came on the radio. 'Essex 395, I hear you.' The pilot said 'We ran out of fuel and we have no place to land.' The voice was that of a Chief Warrant Officer in the United States Navy, and he was close to Washington, and he simply said 'Follow my voice.' And minute by minute, 'Lower your right wing, lower your left wing, just follow my voice.' So calm, so steady. And then he said 'Do not be afraid.' He knew he was dealing with a young pilot. 'Just follow my voice. Just follow my voice.' Suddenly, we looked down. We couldn't have been more than a hundred feet off the ground when we first saw the lights. They were the landing lights of the field, and we glided in to a perfect landing. I could never forget that voice, the quality of the voice, the kindness of the voice, the experience of the voice, the calmness of the voice. 'Follow my voice.'" This is what the Lord says. "Follow Me. Follow My voice. Don't worry, do not be afraid. I will bring you home."

Sometimes we too are riding on empty, and we are desperate for God's help, His guidance. But as we progress in our relationship with the Lord and in the life of prayer, we realize that we never become self-reliant. We always need the Lord to guide us step-by-step, to give us the courage, the strength to live the love that we were made for. And not only do we need the Lord's love to help us, you know, come home to the Father for all eternity in heaven, but knowing His voice is the joy of our lives. It brings meaning and love into the everyday. We come to know who we are. It's literally the joy of our life. And this voice is the voice that stands out amongst all others.

So how do we listen for His voice, and recognize it? That's what we're going to talk about today. And just 3 simple topics. So just first, as we begin, how His voice is for you individually. And then, where do we hear His voice in our hearts? This place of the heart, this place of a dialog in our hearts with the Lord. And lastly, what are some of the hallmarks, the key things that we should know to recognize

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that voice? So His voice is for us. There is one voice that we have all been made to hear. It is the voice of our Father. When He breathed His very life into us, He spoke us into existence, and He said “Become.” That wasn’t just a passing thought when we were created, but He continues to speak this word of life into us, sustaining us, loving us. Each of us is deeply known and loved.

And so this is a voice, whether we realize it or not, that we’re very familiar with, and our whole existence hinges on it, on hearing it. And I love to think not only of the Lord speaking us into life, but sometimes I like to think of each of us as a song. I don’t know if there’s any musicians out there. That each of us is a song that emerged from the Father’s heart. That He longs to sing, to be heard, He longs to be known and spread. And I’m not positive, but I like to think of my song, that the Father sings at me, as *Unforgettable*. Maybe that’s a little bold, but it’s the truth. Each of us is unforgettable, that we have captured His heart, and that’s why we’re here. He’s created us for love, [chk 7:49] love, and He’s created us for a deep union with Him, which fulfills His most cherished desires.

So not only does He speak us into life, but He speaks into our hearts as invitation to the fullness of life. We hear His voice not only the prophets, the church, holy scripture, the living word of God, through the saints, but we hear it most profoundly through the word made flesh, Jesus Christ, who speaks the Father’s love for us. And His voice is not kind of a general voice, but He speaks to us individual, distinctly, uniquely, and has everything for us. Which leads us into our second point. Where does this happen? Where do we come to know the Lord’s voice? And it is in the place of the heart. So what is this dialog of the heart? Hearing the Lord in this place of the heart.

I have a niece, [chk 8:44], who is 4 years old, and we’re asking [chk 8:46] one day, as we often do, you know, “What do you want to pray for today? You know, is it your dad or grandma?” And she stopped to think, and she said “I want to pray for Jesus and for me. That we would be nice to each other.” I think somebody must have told her, you know, when she did something wrong that Jesus didn’t like that. But I really love that she got it. She got that it was a relationship, you know, even if there was something complicated, at the tender age of 4. But this is the beautiful hallmark of prayer, this relationship quality. And so it’s crucial to set aside time for this most important relationship of our lives, even 15-20 minutes a day. But where do we spend this time in prayer? In our hearts.

The Catechism of the Catholic church has a whole section on prayer and, fittingly, it starts with the place of the heart. And I’m going to read a little bit from passage or paragraph 2563 from the Catechism, which speaks explicitly on this. It says “The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live. The heart is our hidden

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center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, the place of encounter, because, as image of God, we live in relation. It is the place of covenant.”

So we have this mysterious place of encounter deep within us at our hidden center. That is so powerful. And when the apostles asked the Lord “Teach us to pray” in Matthew’s gospel, chapter 6, He says “Go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father in secret. Your Father, who sees you in secret, will reward you.” This room is your heart, so go there when you lift up your needs and thoughts to the Lord in prayer.

So how do I pray from the heart? Well, I think it’s important to have a posture of heart to ready ourselves to receive whatever the Lord desires for us in prayer, but also to have a little bit of structure to that time to make it fruitful. So a posture of heart, I think if I sum it up in one word it would be thirst. So when I’m about to go in prayer, I kind of get in touch with “What is my heart thirsty for? What is my heart, like, craving, aching for?” It’s a beautiful place, and the Catechism actually talks specifically about this as well, and referencing the Samaritan Woman at the well. This is paragraph 2560, and it says “The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water.” [Chk 11:32] whenever we’re thirsty. “And there, Christ comes to meet every human being.” He’s already there. “It is He who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. He thirsts. And prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours.” So to be in touch with that thirst.

And then I like to start, you know, in prayer, just asking the Holy Spirit “Come Holy Spirit.” Because when we ask Him to come He comes, and He teaches us how to pray. And then the structure. How can we use this time well? So I like to think of it as a heart-to-heart dialog. So I share my heart for a few minutes, and then I listen in silence to see how does God respond. So I share my heart. Two things to share with the Lord to know that I’m really in the place of the heart, I share my desires and struggles. So my desires, what do I long for? And, you know, especially in the areas of love and happiness. Maybe I spend some time further articulating this thirst that I feel, this thirst for more, right.

And then also important is my struggles, to share that. Where do I feel tension in my heart? Or have I kind of run up against my weakness that’s frustrating me? Wounds or fears, questions. And it takes honesty and courage to really share these things with the Lord, because in both of these places I feel my littleness, how small I am. I need God to fulfill my desires, I can’t do that on my own, but I also can’t tackle my struggles on my own either. I need Him in both of those places. And I can say some of the most powerful graces of my life have been... have stemmed

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from moments of real, sheer honesty with myself before God, and how He's spoken to me and met me in that real reality of that thirst, and transformed me.

And then I wait. So then how does God respond. Okay, so maybe I've just shared with Him, yeah, a desire for deeper love in my vocation, or a desire for purity. Maybe my experience of loneliness, or my fear of sacrifice. Whatever I've shared, how does God respond? Well, a lot of people would jumpstart this listening part by reading scripture, taking out either the gospel of the day, or maybe little by little they're working through a gospel, the whole of a gospel, and to read through it prayerfully and say "Okay, well what is my heart's... where is my heart's attention going as I read this." You know, maybe it's something that's really attracting to me, that's pulling me in, and I can sense that, right. Maybe it's "Wow," I'm reading this gospel and I'm like "Oh, I don't like this, I don't get it," you know. "Why did You say that or do that Jesus?" Right. Or maybe there's just a curious detail, and I'm like "Wow, I never noticed that." But today it's popping out at me, right. So whatever it is, to stay there, linger it. Like, kind of like a little teabag, just let yourself seep there and say "Jesus, why?" You know, "Reveal to me in my own heart what is it that You want to speak to me about."

And over time, even 6 months of doing this, like, what have I been constantly sharing in myself. What do I bring up, or what do I not bring up, right? And then when I give Him a chance to speak and respond, what does He seem to be bringing up? And this takes patience. You know, some days it might be loud and clear, other days it's gentle, very soft. But His voice becomes like an acquired taste, like a dark chocolate or an aged cheese, and we start to recognize it and be sensitive to it, which is a beautiful thing.

And so, as we spend this time in the silence of our heart, what are some of the distinguishing hallmarks of His voice? Well, as Sisters of Life, we are privileged to serve women who are pregnant, in crisis, walk with them, help them to follow with their heart's desire to choose life for their child. This one woman, Ellen, came to us, and she had grown up Christian, and she remembers hearing for years, you know, that people were hearing God's voice and talking to Him, and she was like "Oh my goodness, that's impossible for me. That's never happened to me." And she found herself pregnant, and in the midst of a lot of difficulty she decided she couldn't do it. She just couldn't do it. So she went to seek out an abortion, and she went twice, but both times she left because she was still so conflicted, you know.

And the third time she went in to the abortion clinic for an appointment, she sees a group of people praying outside, and it made her realize "Wow, there's something going on here that's worth fighting for." At the same time, she, yeah, she was a bit in denial, thinking "It's not that big of a deal." And as she was prepared for the

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procedure, and she was about to have it done, the abortion, she hears this voice in her heart that says “Get up.”

And something inside her immediately responded, and she leapt off the table, knowing that it was the voice of her Father, the voice of a Father that was looking after her, loving her, drawing her closer to Himself, protecting her, fighting for her. And she says, in a beautiful way, that that day she said “Ever since that day, God has been speaking to me. I was obedient to that voice, and I will follow Him. He’s talking to me in my heart, and I’m going to listen.” So she not only made a definitive choice for life that day, but a definite choice to listen to God’s voice, to believe that He speaks to her.

And so the first kind of hallmark of God’s voice is that His voice draws our hearts to Him. You know, His is the voice that encourages us, that says “I believe in your capacity to love. Not only your capacity to love, I believe in your capacity for holiness, to do beautiful things with your life.” You know, His voice is never discouraging us, or demeaning us or our sufferings, or throwing us to despair. His voice never accuses us, you know. And He will invite us, because He’s drawing us to Himself, to get rid of things in our life that obstruct that relationship, or that hurt us.

Also, His voice, secondly, reveals to us our own hearts. It’s really beautiful, because we all want to know more about ourselves so that we can live our lives more intentionally, more fully, more freely. And prayer reveals to us our own hearts, not only what I’m passionate about, what makes me angry, what gives me joy, but also reveals to me my goodness, my deep goodness precisely, and oftentimes right in the midst of my weaknesses, that I can know that I am loved. That is my identity. That I am loved not for what I can do or I can earn, but for who I am.

And prayer also reveals to us our own selves in that it can reveal deeper desires that I didn’t even know I had, right. And cast out lies that I believed about myself, that I have maybe been living my life based off that aren’t true. And it can reveal to me also who’s in the driver seat of my life. Is the Lord really in the driver seat, in the pilot seat, or is it fear driving my actions? Is it Money? Is it to please others? Right. In a beautiful way, it can bring our life to new direction as He reveals our hearts to us.

And thirdly, only God’s voice brings peace. A deep peace, you know. Peace comes with living in accordance with God’s will, what’s best for us, really what’s good for us. And even in the midst of difficulty or suffering, there is a deep peace that gives us the strength that we can rest in, to say that “God is here, He’s supporting

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me.” It’s a false peace when it’s paired with something sinful, and therefore it won’t last, and God will continue to stir our conscience, right.

And then lastly, there’s a movement to God’s voice. When God speaks, He’s inviting us to come on a journey with Him. So what are the invitations in my heart that God’s putting, kind of washing on the shores of my heart as I enter into prayer? Is He inviting me to forgive somebody, to let go of something, to get involved with a group that volunteers or, yeah, to love in a new way, to talk to somebody, a friend or a counsellor, about something that’s bothering me? Right. And so you’re going on the right direction, kind of on the right train, if you’re growing in freedom and peace. This is the movement of God’s voice.

And sometimes we can’t hear where the Lord is moving our hearts, where He’s drawing our hearts, because there’s a work of healing, you know, a deep suffering, a wound that God’s healing. And as that resolves, then we’ll be more awake to see what His next invitation will be. Sometimes it’s because we haven’t made a recent or honest confession, and that can clear a lot of noise in our hearts to then begin to hear the Lord’s voice more clearly.

But whatever method of prayer you use, whether it’s with the scriptures, with Lectio Divina, meditation, contemplation, whether it’s something more vocal, Liturgy of the Hours, praying the rosary, of course going to Mass, the greatest prayer, it is crucial to learn to listen with your heart, to share with your heart, to bring in this beautiful depth of relationship and openness of heart, to receive however He wants to lead us. That is a part of every type of prayer.

So I’m excited for you, I’m excited for you to dive in deeper into your prayer, to know more who you are and know more who He is. To receive the gift of His love and let it blossom you into the bold lover that you are and the church needs. God bless you. Let’s end with a prayer.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Father, we know that You have entrusted to us this beautiful, open relationship. You’ve given us Your Son, Your beloved Son in whom You’re well pleased, that we may listen to Him. Help our hearts be open to You and honest with You, to bring into our hearts the fullness of life. We ask all this in Your holy name, Jesus. Amen. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.