

Listening to Jesus



Near the beginning of Lent, the Gospel reading from Mark 9:7 was the story of Jesus' transfiguration on a mountain top in front of his close disciples. After seeing this amazing experience, Peter, James and John were told by God to listen to Jesus, God's beloved Son. How might we listen to Jesus today as his disciples?

At church services, Jesus may speak to us through readings, hymns, prayers or the sermon. Each time we engage in our personal prayer or Bible study we can also expect Jesus to speak to us, but what about the rest of our lives?

When we first try sitting quietly on a bench in our garden, or in a chair inside our house, to deliberately listen to Jesus, it may take a while for us to settle. Perhaps we are anxious or afraid about emptying our mind of activity. Will terrifying thoughts from the past enter and control us? At these times we may need to affirm the presence of Jesus' protective love surrounding us.

If we are outside, Jesus may communicate with us through the beauty of a small flower, a bird's song or the movement of branches slightly stirred by a light wind high up in a tree, and we can give thanks. It is as if for a few moments we are with Jesus in a 'cloud' of God's presence.

When we are physically still and silent, our mind can become very active. We remember an email we need to send or a job we have forgotten to

do. Someone may come into our mind who needs prayer or a visit by us. Through these thoughts Jesus may be speaking to us. We can jot down what we need to do later, and pray for any who enter into our mind. At other times, perhaps when we are exhausted, we can just relax and rest in Jesus.

We may find it helpful to recall a text from the Bible such as “I am with you always, to the end of the age”, Matthew 28:20. What might Jesus be saying to us in it? Is he taking us deeper into our relationship with him, or are we being challenged to act in a way we never have dared to before?

Jesus can speak to us through any of our senses and at odd moments during our day if we are open to ‘hear’. It may be through a newspaper article, a novel we are enjoying, a piece of music or the words of a hymn singing in our head. Even a meal we are eating or a particular picture can be a channel through which Jesus communicates with us. The other day I was so struck by the smooth silky feathers of a pullet I stroked as she nestled contentedly in my arms, that I shared that feeling with a friend. It was a moment of wonder and appreciation of something quite ordinary. Jesus who is involved in all creation was present in the feeling.

When we are attentive and open to God, Jesus speaks to us and through us in our relationships with others. If we are truly listening to people we shall hear not only the words they say, but also what they communicate through their bodies. In other words, we give hospitality to the whole person with whom we are conversing. We invite them into our lives by giving them our attention and time. When listening to people’s stories, for example, we find ourselves entering into how they are feeling as well as what they are saying. There is no selfishness in these relationships but rather a reverence and love for the other.

Such hospitality helps to build a community of compassion and sharing with other people who are broken like us. Further, when we also give hospitality to nature, respecting and caring for it, we build community with the whole of God’s creation given life by the Spirit of Jesus.

In our efforts to focus on other people’s body language, we may need to

ask ourselves, do we 'listen' to our own body and what it might want to tell us? Our body is important and precious. It enables us to hear, see, speak, touch, be touched, and interact with others. Do we always love and care for the body God has given to us?

Regularly listening to Jesus affects our lives in positive ways. When we are stirred up inside and annoyed by what another says to us, we may more easily stop the angry response that rises up within us by first taking time to listen to Jesus. We may even hear how, instead of blaming another, we can work constructively to resolve a conflict situation.

God asks us to listen to Jesus. We can help this to happen by deliberately pausing during the day and being aware of Jesus' presence in and with us. When an opportunity arises, and perhaps each evening, we may talk to Jesus about what has happened and why we are feeling guilty, excited, worried or tired. We need then to stop speaking and listen.

As followers of Jesus we are invited to share our whole lives with him, including the shameful parts. By trying to live open to Jesus and the world, we shall be better prepared to hear Jesus when he communicates with us unexpectedly, encouraging us, or perhaps challenging us to engage in the loving service of others.

Sister Helen CSC

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