

Listening

When we come to the Lord, we often have a list of petitions we would like to voice. This is very good and a healthy part of prayer. However, it is important to give God a chance to answer too. After all, prayer is a conversation, not a monologue. So, if we start a prayer in a mode of 'Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking,' we then need to allow for a mode of 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'

It is not easy to listen. We often hear things, but do not listen to them. They come in one ear, out the other, simply because we are too preoccupied with other things, or too afraid to actually hear properly. Our attention is elsewhere, on matters that seem more important than what is just being communicated to us.

True listening, on the other hand, happens when we are able to, for a moment, suspend our preoccupations and welcome the other person's reality as our own. When we 'bracket out' our ego, put it on hold, and pay attention - even undivided attention - to the other person.

God wants to speak to us even though it is not always through words. We may not hear a voice like Samuel, but a word may emerge in the stillness, or an answer, or a question, or a prompt... An image may carry meaning, or a word from the Scripture may glow with sudden vibrancy. An insight may come to us, or the gifts we have received from God may be affirmed or reinforced. Whatever it is, it is worth our attention and deep listening, followed by a discernment with a trusted person.

Jesus and Listening

Jesus would have grown up with the Jewish prayer 'Shema Israel' (Listen, Israel) from Deuteronomy 6:4. Listening to God was an appropriate and correct stance of the whole people of God. As a faithful Jew, Jesus would recite this prayer morning and evening, and, undoubtedly, would try to live this stance of faithful attentiveness to God in between.

We can see in the Gospels that listening was important for Jesus. When he was twelve, he was found in the Temple listening to the teachers and asking them questions (Lk 2:46). In his public ministry, he listened to people and their problems. He even started some of his key parables with the word 'listen' (Mk 4:3), and reminded people to use their ears for listening well and at depth (Mt 4:9...). What is more, Jesus had a custom of withdrawing to lonely places and tops of mountains to listen to his Father (Mk 1:35, Mk 6:45-46; Mk 14:32-34; Lk 5:16; Lk 6:12...).

At the Transfiguration, the disciples are in turn told to listen to Jesus. The time here, in front of the Blessed Sacrament, is a good opportunity to do just that.

Acknowledgements

Time before the Blessed Sacrament is a series of leaflets produced by the Spirituality Committee in preparation for *Adoremus*. It is intended for individual reflection as part of a time of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament or Exposition. It could also be used with small groups.

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Samuel brought to Eli by George Tinworth.

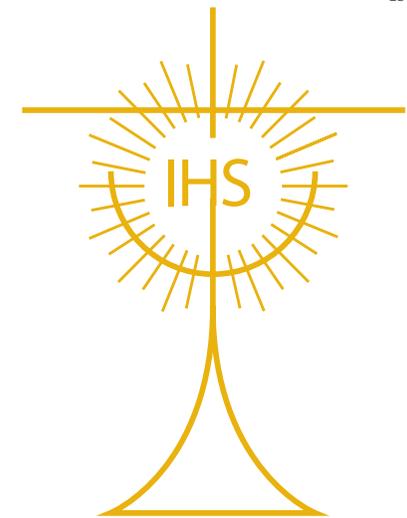
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Time before the Blessed Sacrament

Listening

Incline your ear,
and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live.

Isaiah 55:3



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Looking at Scripture

The boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.

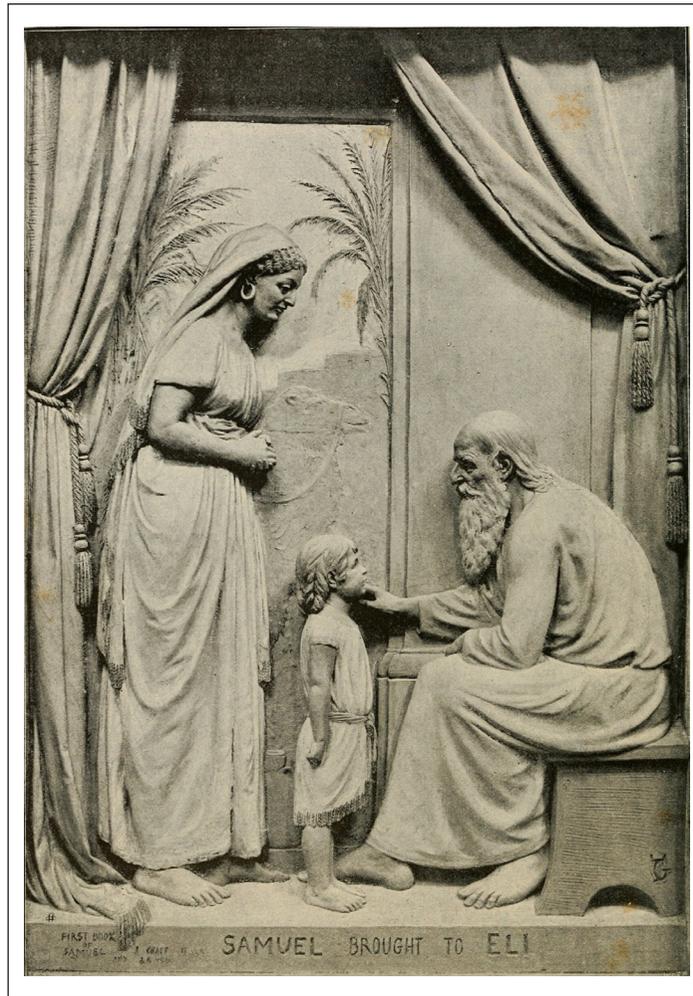
Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down.

And the Lord called again, 'Samuel!' and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant hears.'

1 Samuel 3:1-10)



Reflection

How well am I normally listened to?

How good am I at listening to others?

What stops me from listening at depth?

What can help me listen to God, or listen more attentively?

What is it that God is trying to tell me now?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, the Word of God

Speak to me now

And help me hear you

In whatever way

You wish to communicate with me.

Help me to hand over to you

My concerns and worries

Fears and anxieties

Desires and wishes

For just one moment

So that I can hear

You

The life-giving Word.

Speak now, your servant is listening...

Amen