



—LEANING ON THE HEART OF GOD—

Isn't it a joy to see a little child's face as they gaze upon the world with wonder and particularly when they delight in being surprised?

God delights in surprising *us*, wants us to live lives of wonder and joy because he has called us to a relationship of eternal love with him that begins even now.

Part of that surprise for me was that God wanted such a close relationship with me—with US—that somehow he actually wants to *speak* to us.

*Does God really speak?*

- a. What do the first verses of the Bible say, "And God said...let there be light". God SPOKE the world into existence, including you and me.
- b. As God formed his people he also spoke to them, directing and guiding; often times he spoke to the leaders in what appears to be an audible voice.
- c. Even in New Testament, we "hear" the voice of God at Jesus' baptism and Transfiguration (and elsewhere).

- d. Though today we don't hear God's voice generally outside of ourselves, God does speak and direct us interiorly. Recall Jesus, when speaking about himself as Good Shepherd:  
*"My sheep hear my voice and they follow me."* John 10

During this season, we have more time than ever at home, what an incredible opportunity it is to learn to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. When this period of lockdown is over, my hope is we all will say, "I made the best of this time to grow spiritually, to plant my feet firmly in my faith" so as to continue this growth afterwards.

## SEGMENT 1: *Who is the Holy Spirit?*

It's not easy to picture the Holy Spirit as it is God the Father or God the Son. The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of Jesus" and "Spirit of Father", and the One who dwells in and between them.

He is, if you will, the binding force between the Father and Son, the mutual love and life that is alive between and in them. And the Holy Spirit is our life as well.

The Holy Spirit was there in the beginning at Creation bringing forth life and then poured out in abundant love at Pentecost to bring us eternal life in Christ.

We *begin* to receive this new life at baptism, but it is meant to *increase* in us and to fill us more and more as we walk with Christ, so much so that it goes forth from us with such regularity and power that people recognize their own hunger for it, much like the woman at the well thirsted for the living water Jesus promised.

The Spirit's role is to guide us into the very life and love and relationship of the Father and the Son. He has been sent forth to return all the Father has created back to himself. He's the Father's boomerang, if you like. The Father sends the Spirit to guide his people back home to the Father's Heart through his Son Jesus' intercession and activity. He is cast forth from the Father as both our gift and also to return to the Father what he prizes, you and me. In other words, the Spirit does not return empty handed. He is to bring us with him that *we may be where he is*, between the loving gaze of the Father and the Son.

Imagine for a moment that you could live in that reality all your days on earth—between the eternal gaze of love for the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father:

Is there any better resting place?  
Any better state of peace?  
Any deeper comfort?

The Holy Spirit is also integrally tied into the forgiveness of sin. First, it is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin—not condemn but convict us, show us when we've sinned out of his love for us; Then the Spirit comes upon us when we confess or repent of our sins in the sacrament of Reconciliation:

*19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among*

*them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." John 20*

If this sounds all too poetic and not practical or down to earth enough, let's just say the Spirit is about the work of enlivening our hearts toward God's own heart,  
by working with us, living in and animating us,  
guiding us,  
transforming us into what God always intended:  
a radiant son or daughter of God, filled with his love,  
walking in our calling, our vocation,  
being a blessing to all we encounter,  
delighting God by our loving obedience and  
drawing others into his saving life.

The Holy Spirit is a person, not embodied, but philosophically speaking, he has an intellect/will, has his own identity, and most of all, is relational. Therefore what the Holy Spirit wants for us is to have a *personal* relationship with him. He wants to commune with us and in turn will bring us into a deeper relationship with God the Father and God the Son.

If you're ready to hear from the God of the universe so that he can take you deeper into his love and purpose for your life, join me for the next segment to begin this exciting journey.

Even before we get to the mechanics of all that, it is even more important to present ourselves in prayer daily to the Holy Spirit.  
So I invite you to join me in the Prayer of Consecration to the Holy Spirit from the oldest novena of the Church:

## ACT OF CONSECRATION TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

On my knees before the great multitude of heavenly witnesses, I offer myself, soul and body to You, Eternal Spirit of God. I adore the brightness of Your purity, the unerring keenness of Your justice, and the might of Your love.

You are the Strength and Light of my soul. In You I live and move and am. I desire never to grieve You by unfaithfulness to grace and I pray with all my heart to be kept from the smallest sin against You.

Mercifully guard my every thought and grant that I may always watch for Your light, and listen to Your voice, and follow Your gracious inspirations. I cling to You and give myself to You and ask You, by Your compassion to watch over me in my weakness.

Holding the pierced Feet of Jesus and looking at His Five Wounds, and trusting in His Precious Blood and adoring His opened Side and stricken Heart, I implore You, Adorable Spirit, Helper of my infirmity, to keep me in Your grace that I may never sin against You. Give me grace, O Holy Spirit, Spirit of the Father and the Son to say to You always and everywhere, "Speak Lord for Your servant heareth."

Amen.

## SEGMENT 2: *Creating Sacred Space*

Last time, we talked about how God created us with the intention of having this love relationship with us and we were made for that end. Then, **we** need to also be intentional in fostering our relationship with him: relationship that includes 2-way communication, including our hearing from the Lord.

### How do we begin?

Ideally, I love to pray in the presence of the Lord in the Eucharistic Chapel because I find it more fruitful and productive. But now that we can't be in the Sacred Space of Church, need to make sacred space in our home, for us to have better focus. Now more than ever, we need to be the domestic church, meaning our homes need to be "little churches".

Just as in the church you usually have a favorite spot or place to pray, so it would be good to find a place in your home that you make **your special sacred place**, where you meet with God in an intimate way:

1. Choose a "Prayer Corner" free of daily distractions as much as possible. A place where we can be present to God, to experience what the Lord means when he says in scripture:

"Be still and know that I am God." Where he can commune with you and share with you the deepest contents of his heart.

2. What we're trying to do is to set ourselves in a mode and in a place to foster a REGULAR practice of listening, exercising our hearing.

I love that passage from Isaiah 50 we hear during Lent

*Morning after morning  
he opens my ear that I may hear;  
and I have not rebelled,  
have not turned back.*

This describes prophetically Jesus, the Suffering Servant. And indeed this is what God desires for us, that God would open our ear so that we would hear and not turn back, but obey what he tells us to do.

3. What should be there to help that happen in our Prayer Corner:

- a. Bible
- b. Daily Devotional Books or Spiritual Reading Material
- c. Candle
- d. Crucifix
- e. Christian Artwork
- f. Candle
- g. Prayer Journal where you can write what you sense the Lord is speaking to you.

You want to surround yourself with holy guide posts...to create an environment that places you in a holy mindset, making yourself ready to hear from your Lord, the Lover of your Soul.

4. For us to maximize our experience, it might help to
  - a. Choose A Regular Time of Prayer each day. That discipline is foundational to *Discipleship*.
  - b. Do your best to not allow unnecessary interruptions or distractions, at least as much as possible given our living situation. Fr. Michael Scanlan used to speak to business leaders. When he addressed CEOs and the like, he used to say if you had an appointment with a very important client, you would tell your secretary, “Hold all my calls. I want no interruptions.” Fr. Scanlan would go on to say, “How much more with the God of the universe” who is your primary relationship?...

Why is all of this so important to our walk with Christ, our discipleship? Here’s a brief story, the timing of and simplicity of which radically changed my life:

While I was driving from Harvard in MA to Buffalo NY, I flipped on the radio that happened to be a Christian station, and the man was saying, “Why is it that we make our plans and pray that God will bless them? Why not ask the Lord what HIS plans are and then be blessed by doing them?” That so struck me, it changed my life and set my trajectory to try to first *listen* to what God wanted from me and then move out and do it.

Let us pray our Act of Consecration to the Holy Spirit.

### SEGMENT 3: *Clearing Our Hearing!*

Here's a fascinating verse from Psalm 40 that, when we understand it in its original language, paints a marvelous picture for us in God helping us hear the Lord's voice, the voice of the Holy Spirit:

*In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,  
but you have given me an open ear.*

God opened his ears. In Hebrew, this means “dug out”! May the Lord dig out any impediments for us that we may hear.

Here are some of those impediments

- 1) Hesitation in listening, the fear of whose “voice” you may be hearing. This was my experience, but I felt the Lord impress upon me: “You can always cross out later what you discern was not from me, but if you don't listen, how will you ever hear?”
- 2) Unforgiveness. Our next online series will be devoted to Forgiveness, so won't go into detail here, suffice to say that forgiveness is a necessary virtue that gives life and vitality to our relationship with God and others and—when properly understood not as an emotion, but an act of the will—it is achievable with God's grace, even if it takes a long time. Without forgiveness operating in us, it as if the door to our hearing is closed. It is a major impediment to our hearing the Lord's voice because we must forgive in order to be in a right relationship with the one who himself forgave us at the cost of his own life.
- 3) Not following through. (Like a coach or teacher of musical instrument who wants to take a student further, but cannot because that student did not learn the basics and apply them. The same is true in the spiritual life.) For God to entrust us with more, we must show our trustworthiness in taking seriously what we discern he is asking of us and then *doing it*.
- 4) Practicing anything contrary to God's will, as outlined in Sacred Scripture and Church teaching, particularly in areas of morality or attitudes toward others and even our speech. James, for example, warns us to watch how we use our tongue. Do we build up or tear down, do we empower or put down, do we gossip, etc.? Any of these behaviors undermines our dignity and that of those around us and can become walls that can shut the voice of the Spirit out, or limit our effectiveness to hear. **Do everything you can to keep your spirit “clear” and unimpeded.** The Holy Spirit will help us to do this if we only ask!
- 5) Inordinate pride or a belief, even subconsciously, that we are self-sufficient and not dependent upon God for our lives, even our very breath, can keep us from hearing. This is partly why Paul is so insistent that we “put on the mind of Christ Jesus”:

*6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>[b]</sup> 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,<sup>[c]</sup> being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2*

We will only hear if we are clear that God is God and we are not. We can only ascend to where God wants us if we descend by humbly submitting ourselves to the Lord, entrusting our lives in his hands.

In that spirit, let us conclude by praying our prayer of Consecration to the Holy Spirit.

## SEGMENT 4—*How God Speaks to Us*

We talked the last time about how *we should pray that God would do with us what he did with the author of Ps 40 who says God opened his ears*, literally in Heb=dug out. God cleared out the distractions, noise, clutter. May the Lord indeed dig out any impediments that we may clearly hear the voice of the Holy Spirit who deeply desires to commune with us in part by communicating with us.

So, in what ways Does God speak today that we might hear?

A number but you might be surprised and disturbed by the First and Primary Way:

### 1. Sacred Scripture

- a. Why is this *surprising*? For many of us who want to hear God's voice it seems we rarely go to the Sacred Scripture to hear him. We're waiting for some sort of other revelation, something perhaps *easier* than the scriptures. Admittedly, it does take some work, some study, some digging to understand and apply God's Word in the Bible, but it is always worth it in the end. It's important to remember these are God's LOVE LETTERS to his people that he went to great lengths to work with and through the sacred authors to get to us. They can be likened to the Treasure Buried in the Field that the man found, then went off and sold all he had to buy that field and get that treasure.
- b. God's word is effective and powerful. It is synonymous with his action. (He spoke and it came to be—with no delay.) If indeed, God "spoke" albeit through the sacred writers—that word can truly transform our lives and help us, as we talked about last time, to have "the mind of Christ Jesus". Jesus is called THE WORD MADE FLESH and as such the words he spoke carried such power as to calm the raging sea, drive out raving demons, make broken people whole, and raise the dead! That same word needs to get INTO us, to become flesh *in us* to have God's desired effect on our lives.
- c. How is Sacred Scripture as the primary way God speaks *disturbing*? Consider the quote from St. Jerome who translated scriptures from its original languages into Latin:

"Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ"

What he is saying is, if you don't know Jesus of the gospels in his totality, you don't know Jesus. If you don't know the word that was made flesh in him, meaning the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament), which is the vast majority of the Bible, you don't know Jesus in his fullness. Yikes! That can be overwhelming, but God doesn't expect us to know all of that now. God does want us day by day, to take time to learn his word so that it works in us to do his good will and pleasure.

- d. So, if we want to HEAR from God the timeless word he has already spoken...if we want power that truly transforms us, bringing us into communion with God, and intimacy with Jesus, and the abundant life the Holy Spirit wishes us to bring us, we need to take time for God's word on a daily basis, even if we start small with a few minutes of prayerful reading each day. Studying it with helpful resources that are abundant these days should give us pause as to why we don't make time for it. Below, we've placed suggested resources for further study of God's word to help make it more accessible, so please check those out.
- e. Simply put, to lay a firm foundation for listening, it's important to know the BASICS of his word in scriptures. Remember Jesus said in Jn, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit, will remind you of all I taught you? *He can only remind us of something that we have already within us.* I've been blessed to be able to study the scriptures since I was in my late teens and here's some of the fruit of that: Often found when praying for direction, a particular Bible phrase or passage will come to mind that turns out to be direction from the Lord for the situation in which I find myself. That could not happen if they word wasn't living in me to some extent.

## 2. How else might God speak to us in addition to Scriptures

When you're listening quietly:

### a. What you might "hear":

- 1) Words
- 2) Phrases
- 3) Songs
- 4) Images
- 5) Impressions you sense the Lord guiding you in a certain way

Start with the small stuff. Ask the Lord to direct you in something simple during your day. Bring him into your decision-making, and follow his lead if even it doesn't make sense.

Something startling I've learned over the years:

Common sense not always Godsense, or put another way: Good ideas are not always God's ideas. (E.g. Peter and the other apostles often misunderstood Jesus' intentions and were about to get in the way of his plans until he corrected them.) I had a powerful experience when I was in Phx AZ to give presentations years ago. It was a Sun. AM. I was planning to spend an hour of quiet time with the Lord in prayer, then go to the 11:00 Mass. As I prayed, I felt the Lord was prompting me to go to the 9:00. We argued about it...didn't make sense, but I had been through this type of

experience a no. of times with the Lord when, can you believe it(!) he wanted to change my plans. I knew the fruit of not following Jesus' leading, so I decided to go to 9:00 Mass. When Mass was over, the Church cleared out. Finally, I was alone until...I heard someone crying quietly all the way on other side of this large church...Dilemma: do I go over or does she want to be left alone? I ventured over, asked her if she wanted to talk. She poured out her heart: she and her husband were supposed to move, he lost his job, they couldn't make rent...We talked and I asked her if she remembered the passage from Matthew's Gospel (6:24ff) in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus asks why we worry about what we're going to eat, drink, and wear...the Father knows you need all of these. Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be added besides." We prayed together and you could see the weight was lifted from her as she smiled. I said, "Isn't God amazing? I was planning to come to the 11:00 Mass, but felt I should come instead to the 9:00. If I hadn't we would not have met." "I wasn't at the 9:00 Mass...I was driving by the church and felt I should stop and pray. My prayer was, "Lord, I know you love me, but if you really love me, send someone to talk to me." "Does he LOVE you?? He sent some yahoo from 2000 miles away to reassure you that he loves you!" This was quite a faith builder for both of us and a lesson for me in the importance of listening even when not understanding the "why" up front.

Let us close with our prayer of consecration to the Holy Spirit...

## SEGMENT 5: *Discerning What We Hear*

How do we know it is God speaking?

Here couple of tests or guideposts:

- 1) Is it in concert with Sacred Scripture/Church teaching overall or contrary to it? This presupposes some working knowledge of those two aspects of God's revelation. God is not a God of confusion but of truth. Truth does not change as with fads, though our understanding of it develops with the help of the Holy Spirit. If what we're hearing is opposed to what God revealed already, then we can be certain it is not the voice of the Spirit. However, if it is in line these streams of God's revelation, that could mean a "green light"
- 2) Is it consistent way God has moved you in the past when you felt impelled to do something and it produced good fruit?
- 3) Share what you're receiving in prayer with a trusted friend who is more mature spiritually and who is in tune with the Holy Spirit.
  - a. How do they feel about it?
  - b. Does it resonate with their experience? Their knowledge of how God works? These are safeguards that help us to know.

### What to do about it?

Follow Through! If you are 80-90% certain what you're hearing is from God—and you have a lasting PEACE in your spirit (even if your emotions are tenuous), step out in faith and obey. The fruit it bears will tell you if you heard correctly (not necessarily the short-term fruit of someone else's reaction to what you are doing, but the fruit your obedience bears in the long run). You'll make some mistakes along the way as everyone does, but those can help you fine-tune your hearing. Just as those of us old enough to remember having to adjust the dial to our radios to get the signal to the station clearly without static, you'll learn to land on that clearer and stronger signal of the Holy Spirit.

Always be encouraged that when you seek the Lord, he is RIGHT THERE, there is an immediacy about his presence—even if you don't feel it tangibly--because he has preceded your coming! Whether you hear his voice, receive some kind of sense of how God is leading in general or more specific,

God is delighted you came and will make himself known to you in sometimes deeper ways than you can initially perceive or discern.

So...

Simply rest. Rest in his Presence, in his Love, in the Confidence of his desire for you, to be in relationship with you.

Never give up on him as he never gives up on you!

There is a beautiful image that speaks of that kind of posture that Jesus had with his Father that we can hold onto and make our own:

*14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son<sup>[d]</sup> from the Father, full of grace and truth. 16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God,<sup>[f]</sup> who is at the Father's side,<sup>[g]</sup> he has made him known. John 1*

This is how Jesus lived his life, ever leaning on the Father. In the most original manuscripts of the New Testament, in Greek, the phrase: *who is at the Father's side* literally means, at the Father's breast. Jesus ever leaned on the heart of his Father and this is why he could say, "I only speak what the Father commands...I only do what I see the Father doing."

Jesus wants us to follow his lead. He wants us to lean on him, with our head on his chest, leaning into his heart, resting in his love, being with him...and thus becoming *like* him, hearing with quiet confidence what he is calling us to do and even more importantly what he is calling us to *be* in him. And when we do, we'll realize the Father is holding us from the other side, and indeed the Spirit has done his work and brought us to be where he is, between the loving gaze of the Father and the Son!

Thank you for joining me for this series. Let's conclude with our Act of Consecration to the Holy Spirit.

### Resources for Further Scripture Study:

1. When we are able to be together in one place, join an existing Bible study where you are inspired by the content, that is not strictly a lesson in academics. In the meantime:
2. Go to FORMED.ORG by copying and pasting this address in your browser: [sthilarychurch.formed.org](http://sthilarychurch.formed.org)  
If you have an account, log in; if not create for a free account. Then search for the **Lectio** series of Bible studies. They are excellent.
3. Visit Bishop Barron's website where you can purchase his courses on DVD inexpensively  
[www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org)

4. Purchase a study Bible such as Great Adventures that has study helps such as a timeline of salvation history so you get the big picture and understand individual books in context:

<https://shop.ascensionpress.com/products/the-great-adventure-catholic-bible>

Or the New Testament by Scott Hahn:

<http://www.scotthahn.com/ignatius-study-bible/>

5. Do Jeff Cavins' and Sarah Christmyer's 90 Day Bible Reading Plan:

<http://assets.ascensionpress.com/tga/student/90DayReadingPlan.pdf>

6. Download an app that provides the readings for the day and/or provides meditations on the Sunday readings or just listening to recordings of scriptures. Possibilities:

### **Laudate App**

#1 Catholic App. Daily readings, reflections, complete source for Prayer, Order of Mass, and much more:

<https://catholicapps.com/laudate/>

### **Bible Gateway App**

Multiple translations, audio bibles, reading plans, and commentary. Bible Gateway by HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/bible-gateway/id506512797?mt=8>

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