



Day 2 | Wednesday, March 9, 2022
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In the stories of our lives, who are the people or the events that have opened us up to hear the voice of God? I'm thinking about those moments, big or small—a conversation, or a retreat, a song or something in a homily, or perhaps a personal crisis or a profound experience of beauty. These are those experiences in which we let our guard down and God breaks into our lives in a deeper way.

When I was in college, I participated in things spiritual and religious, but for a while I still preferred to keep God at a comfortable distance. I was much more interested in having a social life and being well-liked at that time and I wasn't sure where things would lead if I really was open to hearing the voice of God. I did have some vocational stirrings around that time, and I especially didn't want to listen to those. By being closed off, by keeping God at a distance, I didn't have to fear what God might say or where it might lead. Oh, and at that point in my life, I was a little judgmental of people who were more public with their faith life.

However, despite that attitude, God opened me up anyway, as I noticed how much I enjoyed certain friends who were intentional about fostering a closer relationship with God. They were joyful and happy, and I felt at home with them. At one point, one of them invited me to listen to a prayerful concert by a fellow student at my university, who went on to record several albums of music—a woman named Danielle Rose. As I listened to her music, I felt that it cut through the walls of my heart and spoke to me of God's intimate love. There was something there that resonated with me and warmed my heart—like those disciples on the road to Emmaus who encounter the Lord, in the unfamiliar traveler. Her joy and faith and reminder of Jesus' love for me, consoled me, to use Ignatian language, and reminded me of what would most deeply satisfy me.

That was a small moment on my journey, in which I felt God break-in through a beautiful song that spoke a truth I needed to hear, and which consoled my heart. It also was a time in which I learned what I was looking for in friendship and found friends who nourished my heart. That moment was not a dramatic moment of transformation, but it was an opening. It opened the door of my heart to new people and reignited my desire for God. Once I experienced the consolation of that moment in my life the walls I had put up seemed foolish by comparison. Though the desire to be in control will probably always be a temptation for me, the consoling joy of that moment gave me a little boost in the direction of surrender.

In each of our lives, there are particular dynamics that can keep us from being able to be open the voice of God. We might be angry because of something that has happened to us or

perhaps events that happen in the life of the Church. But then that anger can become resentment, when we don't feel heard by others or by God. When we're blinded by resentment, we can't hear the voice of God. Or we may be closed off because we feel ashamed. We don't dare opening ourselves up to hear who we are in God's eyes, because don't think we're going to like what we hear. We assume that God judges us the way we judge ourselves. Or we may be closed off because, like me, we prefer to be in control of our own lives. We fear that God might ask something of us that we don't want to do, whether that be forgiving someone we are resentful of or taking a difficult stand. To be open to hear the voice of God, is to be vulnerable. And to be vulnerable can be scary.

Whatever the dynamics are for each of us, we're encouraged today by the readings to open up to the voice of God. In today's first reading, God speaks to Jonah a second time. Yes, a second time, because the first time, Jonah was not open to really hearing and responding to God's voice. He was too resentful of the Ninevites to want to preach to them. They might actually repent. It took a whale to open him up to become God's voice for them. And Jonah's worst fears came true! He became an incredibly successful prophet and had to let go of the resentment he carried, to let God's desire for reconciliation to be done. In the gospel, Jesus gets angry with the crowd because they refused to acknowledge God at work in his words and deeds. Just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites of God's mercy, so Jesus too becomes that everlasting sign, when after his three days in the ground, he rose from the dead. Paradoxically, in God's wisdom, Jesus' death on the cross, only becomes a louder and enduring message of God's love and solidarity with us in our own weakness. In Jesus, God meets us where we struggle to be open to God's love, and God just keeps loving us.

As we also think about those holy friends we remember today-- Ignatius and Francis Xavier—we see folks who were closed off, but through the events of their lives, became open to encountering Jesus. For Ignatius, of course, it took a cannon ball to break open his heart, to listen voices, other than his insatiable desire for self-focused honor and glory. In his recovery bed, he became attracted to the gentle and humble voice Jesus, who satisfied what his previous life could not. Years after his conversion, Ignatius encountered Francis Xavier, who also put up quite a fight and tried to stay closed off to the invitations of God in his life. He initially kept Ignatius at a distance while they were in college together and resisted Ignatius' invitations to experience the spiritual exercises. Ignatius once said that Xavier was the lumpiest dough that he ever had to knead. It took Ignatius' persistence and determined faith to open up Xavier's heart.

The readings and the examples of these saints, and the experiences of our own lives remind us of how God is always at work so that God's will for the healing and wholeness of the world might be done. When God speaks to us, God calls us to be reconciled, to be healed and to be made more whole, so that we might also bring that reconciliation, healing, and wholeness to others.

So today we pray for the openness to hear God speak. So that that voice of love might captivate us again and might attract us in the ways that God has in the past. As that love sinks deeper in our souls and roots us more in who God desires us to be, we pray that we too like Jesus, Ignatius, and Francis Xavier, might be people who encourage others to open up to God and participate in what God desires for the world.

Finally, let's trust that no matter where we are on our path, God accepts us where we are and will meet us there, through the risen Christ to heal the wounds, the fears, and the pride that keep God at a distance at times.

As we enter into a short period of silence, I encourage you to ask for the grace to be open to hear the voice of God in our lives. I also invite you to consider a couple of reflection questions in addition to the ones printed in your booklet.

- Who are the people or the events that have opened us me to hear the voice of God in the past?
- What is keeping me from hearing and responding to the voice of God in my life today?
- Who needs me to speak God's words of love today?

Through God's grace and the intercession of St. Francis Xavier, may we be open to hearing and responding to the voice of God in our lives and to speaking God's words of love.