

LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

Pandemic Awakenings

Day 1 – How to Pray in Faith



First it may be important to reflect on the way we have traditionally been taught how to pray and presumably this is still the way many of us still pray. Usually this amounts to saying our prayers, having a conversation with the Lord about our cares and concerns, letting him know our needs, and generally hoping that God will look after things and that all will be well. All of this is an important way of deepening our relationship with God.

However, the word disciple carries the sense of being a learner and a listener. This is where we usually fall short. We don't usually ask like the disciples, *Lord, teach us to pray* and let our prayer be then guided in a certain direction. The well-known verse from the Book of Samuel; *Speak Lord your servant is listening* has been replaced with: **Listen Lord your servant is speaking**. This presupposes that what we have to say to the Lord is more important than what he has to say to us. To slowly move from words to simply being silent in the presence of the Lord is a huge step for so many. It is also coming into the place of listening.

Day 2



The Sound of Silence

Christ must have shocked his followers when he said; *When you pray do not babble like the pagans thinking that the more they multiply words the greater their chances of being heard.* The words still shock those who have never known any other way of praying and who are caught with set formulas and having to adhere to a set number of prayers and at certain times. Becoming a listener in prayer is of the utmost importance if we are going to have anything worthwhile to say.

Words that are born of silence have a ring of authenticity that is absent in idle chatter. Having spent time in silence we may not be aware of having heard anything, but afterward the quality of our presence is very different and we approach difficult situations or people with greater wisdom. Our hectic pre Corona lifestyle often left us only physically present to loved ones and not even present to ourselves. One mother who was constantly on the go was shocked by her seven-year-old daughter who said: *Mummy I miss you so much, even when you are at home!*

Day 3



The importance of Attunement

When we listen something new is born.

An elderly farmer was visiting his friend in town. While walking down a crowded street he stopped and said, 'Listen to the sound of that cricket'. His friend was amazed and said 'How can you possibly hear a cricket above all the noise and traffic?' 'Easy,' he said, 'just watch'. Taking some coins from his pocket he let them fall on the pavement. They didn't make much noise but lots of people stopped in their tracks and followed the sound. 'You see,' said the old man, 'it's only a question of attunement'.

Becoming sensitive to the whispers of the spirit is an art we can acquire and refine. Usually that whisper carries a sense of excitement and often a challenge that will move us out of our comfort zone. Sometimes it feels like a strong intuition or a hunch. It's when we don't argue with the hunch that we see how important it was and the way it protected us. Driving early one morning as I approached a bend I had a sudden intuition to slow down and keep well in to my side of the road. Just then a car came speeding round the corner in the middle of the road driven by someone who was either drunk or high on something. That kind of word always has our best interests at heart.

Day 4



The Futility of *Trying* to Listen

Some of the most common things said in relation to listening to God are: I could be listening for a month of Sundays and not hear anything, or That's for the saints but not for me, I would never be worthy enough for God to speak to me and even if He did I wouldn't be able to hear anyway. The common denominator in all such statements and beliefs is the 'I'. Even if the 'I' could succeed in hearing the voice of God it would give itself the credit and be proud of itself. So long as the I or ego remains at the centre of our belief system we simply will not be able to hear anything or even to discern anything. While ego is in charge there is no surrender and without letting go there is no listening. To even think that I need to hear what the Lord is saying to me about this or that is to put ego firmly at the center. Even if the Lord were speaking, ego would not want to hear because it would herald its displacement. As shocking as it seems the beginning of real listening begins with the acknowledgement that I cannot and I never will be able to hear the voice of God.

Day 5



The Art of Listening

If I cannot hear the voice of God that does not mean that the voice of God is not speaking or that the voice of God can never be heard. It's a question of focus. Am I looking at my ability to hear, or am I trusting in God's ability to speak? If my focus is on the latter then God has infinite possibilities in how He chooses to reveal Himself.

Certainly the Scripture is the book of God's revealed truth but the entire world of nature is His palette. When someone is open to listening in trust, the Word can be spoken in a myriad of ways - a chance encounter, an unexpected event, a deep conversation or a silent whisper. There are no limits. What I believe determines what I get. The important thing is that my trust is in God's ability to speak in spite of my deafness, blindness, stubbornness or any other limitation.

One of the biggest reasons we don't hear the Lord is because we don't want to hear. Life divides into two classes of people; those who say to God: *Thy will be done*, and those to whom God says: *okay have it your own way*. If we fall into the second category the voice of God will be an affront to our ego, so we will close our minds to any form of listening. Similarly if we fear hearing because of what we might be asked, that too will close our ears. It is true that we will always be called to what is beyond us but that is where faith comes in. The Lord will never call but he will empower and he will never lead us where he will not provide. Many of us go through life feeling that when it comes to surrender we can only go so far and there is always a part that we hold back on. Yet this is the bit that always trips us up. Perhaps the honest thing to do is accept our inability and reluctance to surrender and offer that to the Lord. Full surrender is a place we are brought to rather than somewhere that we are capable of going to, but we do need to say 'Yes' to Thy will being done

Day 6

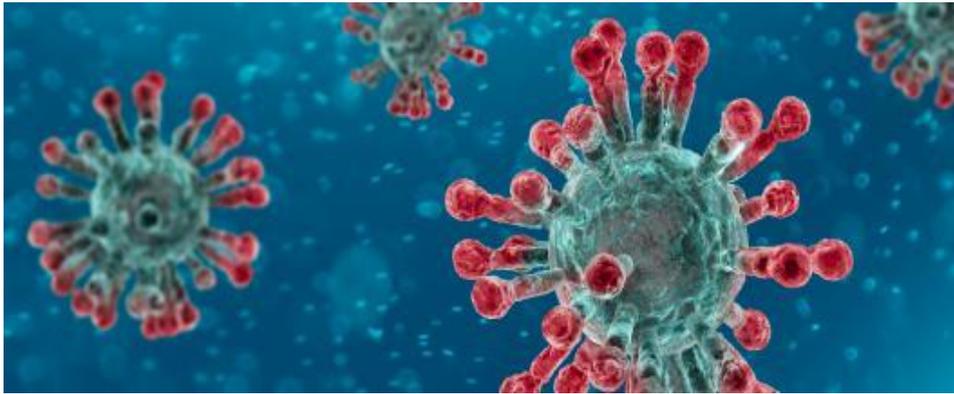


The Wonder of Inner Life - How We See

There is always another way of looking at everything and it's not usually what we see but how we see something that will determine our response. To quote the writer Dale Carnegie; *Two men looked out through prison bars. One saw mud and the other saw stars.* The Jewish Talmud teaches that; *we see things not as they are but as we are*, so it's important to ask the question, how do I see this current crisis? Jesus said; *I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.* If we were to take those words of Jesus and apply them to the Corona virus, could we say that the virus, that has brought with it so much death and suffering, is also here that we might have life? Initially we will think that it is the last thing we need, but could it be here to teach us some very important lessons? Certainly it's a horrible darkness but it too must have come from the divine light. I was surprised, and I'm sure many were shocked, to hear a celebrity on the Late Late say recently that the world needed the corona virus. So what might it be teaching us and what might its higher purpose be? How might it be here to bring us a better life and not death as would initially appear?

If we look at how our natural world has been abused and exploited. While so many are gasping for breath nature is catching hers and already recovering at a phenomenal rate. We were careering towards the edge of a precipice, and quite oblivious to the fact, until mother nature stopped us in our tracks, perhaps just in time. Brian Darcy made the point in an email the other day that God forgives, we sometimes forgive, but nature never forgives. This virus is not a living thing. It is something that a cell excretes in order to ensure its survival after becoming poisoned. Whatever about us needing Covid 19 Mother Nature had become so poisoned she needed to get rid of it.

Day 7 - A Teachable Moment



It seems highly possible to use a phrase from the Prophet Isaiah that; *like sheep had all gone astray and each one to his or her own way*. As our lives had become busier and busier we were losing the run of ourselves and had become more **human doers** rather than **human beings**. This is the time for being when we can't do all that much. Human worth had become identified with how productive we were rather than who we were. *To be or not to be* was the big question posed by Hamlet and we had unconsciously chosen not to be and settled for doing. This is the time when we have little option except to slow down and simply to be. It must be acknowledged that the initial experience of simply being is excruciatingly difficult if we were always doing something or going somewhere.

The great paradox was that when this virus struck, our world was never as full and yet more and more we were feeling unfulfilled. What we didn't realize was that the bigger the doughnut the greater the hole and we were falling into it. As our world expanded outwardly we were moving farther from our centre and were fast losing touch with who we really were. Outward appearances had become all important. Now the all important labels mean very little; those once concerned with appearance are wearing unsightly face masks and gloves now cover the once manicured nails. In the words of a Johnny Cash song; *it's a long and painful journey on our lonely way back home*. No matter how long or painful it may be, Corona is leading us back home to ourselves. And of course we thought we didn't need it!

At a spiritual level we stand at one of the most teachable moments in human history. We are now able to hear Truth at a level we were unable to until now. When Christ was feeding the five thousand with the loaves and fish he told the people to sit down. Prior to this we were always standing up, with our mind on where we were going, but now we are forced to sit. While many will try to return to so called normal life when this virus is over, there will be loads who will experience the most profound spiritual awakening of their lives. This kind of awakening never happens while we are complacent in our comfort zone but only when we have been pushed to the edge or in this case far beyond. Many are realizing during this time of enforced reflection that they had settled for a life that was far less than what was intended for them. This will mean radical changes in terms of career and lifestyle. Further down the road they will very likely look back with gratitude to these very challenging times. So while there is nothing inherently good in this virus, how might I need it just now and **how might it be gifting my life?**