
Introduction

When I was just starting out, I was a geologist and had the opportunity to map rocks in the Unita mountains of Utah and in the Tendoy mountains of southwestern Montana. I was up high in the mountains in summertime where shepherds tend to the sheep. The shepherds lived in wooden trailers that they moved along as the sheep moved about. I could always tell when I was approaching them because I could always smell them long before I saw them. At the time I often wondered if the same was true of me for the sheep.

It is true that the sheep know the voice of their shepherd and the shepherd knows his sheep. I've seen it. This happens because they live together, shepherds and sheep, and know each other very well.

Part one how to hear and know His voice

Sheep have an unfair advantage over us. Up high in the mountains they can distinguish their shepherd's voice from the others, and they will then follow the one voice. Not so for us. There are so many, many competing voices for our attention on the television, radio, phone, computer with the enormous number of voices clamoring for our attention on various social media platforms that we can access in so many ways; we can be so interconnected.

With all of the noise and distractions, it can be very difficult to hear the voice of the Lord, it really does take a conscious effort on our part to do so.

So, what are some of the practical tips or advice for hearing the voice of the Lord?

- The first is silence and prayer. Every spiritual master will tell you that setting aside time every day for silence and prayer is critical.

St. Teresa of Avila didn't say that the way to hear the Lord was to go out into the town marketplace and stand among the crowd, but rather to go inside oneself.

I'm not speaking of an empty silence with nothing to do. Instead, it is a silence in which you are being attentive to the presence of God in your life and what He may be saying to you. St. Catherine of Siena speaks of the inner cell of our hearts.

How do we achieve silence? For me, I find that turning off my phone for hours at a time works best. I know a guy who 2 or 3 years ago put his smart phone away for Lent and

went back to one of those old flip style phones. He didn't go back to the smart phone after Easter.

So, when we are in prayer and silence, how do we know that it is the voice of Jesus that we hear?

- It will be consistent with scripture and teaching of the Church.
- It will be consistent with the demands of your vocation.
 - o If you are a husband and father – abandoning your wife and family isn't from God.
- It will bring you peace of mind and joy of heart.
- With time you will gain confidence in recognizing His voice.

Now that you can hear His voice and know that it is His – what's next? You follow Him.

We, each and every one of us, are unique individuals created by God and are given specific gifts to be used for building up the Body of Christ.

We are also uniquely created by God with a calling. Early in life discerning that call revolves around things like choosing a career; things like working in the trades, medicine, law, arts or business.

Then there is the calling to states of life. Should I marry, and if so whom? Or am I to remain single, at least for now.

It is vocation Sunday, and I would be remiss not to mention callings to holy orders or to religious life as a sister or brother or to consecrated life. Last weekend my wife and I had the privilege to witness a friend of ours make her final profession as a Benedictine Sister. She was incredibly happy, and it was an amazing experience to watch. If these sorts of vocations are something that you may be thinking you are called to – I strongly encourage you to talk to Father or me or someone in the archdiocese for further information.

Later in life, the callings change. The children are out of the house, now what? Should I retire now or later? If now, what should I be doing with my time? My spouse has died, now what am I called to do?

Transition to part two Jesus' two promises

Having heard the Lord's voice, know that it is His, and chosen to follow him, now what?

In the Gospel Jesus makes us two promises:

- He will give us eternal life.
- And He will not allow anyone to take us from Him.

The notion of eternal life can be difficult to grasp. There is no website that we can go to watch a couple of short videos and maybe scroll through some pictures. Instead, we have John's vision of eternal life in today's second reading.

"I John had a vision of a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue." If that is still too abstract for you, think of being at the state fair on Labor Day weekend.

The multitude no longer suffer from hunger or thirst because the Lamb of God has led them to life-giving water.

They no longer experience anguish or pain because God has wiped away every tear from their eyes.

They no longer wander homeless because the Lord has given them shelter.

The great multitude worships God day and night because He has fulfilled all of His promises. He has healed them of all of their wounds, lifted all of their burdens and given them the fulness of joy forever. It is no wonder that this reading is proclaimed so often at funerals.

John's vision in Revelation is a symbolic representation of what we can hardly begin to imagine: the very real and very beautiful eternal life that is to come.

Finally, the second promise – that God will not allow anyone or anything to take us from Him. No one or no thing can take us out of the Father's hand. But – we can and certainly do at times let go of His hand.

That is the reality of our faith and our free will. This past Thursday Fr. James and I were at the cathedral with our young people who were being confirmed. Several times Bishop Izen reminded those who were about to be confirmed that they needed to cooperate with the gifts of the Holy Spirit that they were about to receive.

Closing statement

Our faith isn't magic, something that we simply passively receive. Rather, we need to continually reach out to Him and to follow Him so that He can bring us to eternal life with Him. We are all in this together, we pray for and support each other as a community of believers. Amen.