

#8 The Still Small Voice in Worship

St. Paul tells us that “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” (1 Corinthians 14:26) For us to edify the Body we must be obedient to God speaking to each of us prophetically. St. Paul tells us in this verse that “each one” has some manifestation of the Spirit “for edification” of the Church. But how does our Lord speak? Sometimes with an impression about something. Sometimes He gives us a vision. And sometimes our Lord speaks with a still small voice from His Spirit directly to ours.

There is an example of this phenomenon recorded in Acts 13. The faithful are gathered together in Antioch and they are doing the liturgy. In the context of that service the Lord speaks to the congregation. Here’s how St. Luke recorded it:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:1-3)

They were worshiping. The Greek word used here is “liturgy”. Most likely they were celebrating the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist. So we can imagine what that would have looked like. Then the Holy Spirit speaks. But how? The Scripture doesn’t say. But it is possible that a member of the congregation, while praying and praising heard a still small voice say the names Barnabas and Saul. The Spirit may have said it a couple of times. Finally, this person tells the leader of the service, “I keep hearing the names Barnabas and Saul.” The elders then instruct the congregation to pray for discernment, and the prophesying begins to flow. The Lord spoke in a still small voice, and quite possibly to the smallest, and youngest, member of the congregation.

When we gather for worship, you may hear a specific word in one of the praise songs or one of the lessons, prayers, or even in the sermon, that strikes you. It could be a word, a phrase, a verse of Scripture, or the lyrics of a song. And the Lord is speaking to you, Spirit to spirit. When this happens, you can speak up and say, “I think the Holy Spirit is saying...” Or if you sit on it and it keeps coming back, it is important for you to speak up and tell the clergy or the congregation as a whole, “I keep hearing this word...” Then, in either case, we as a Body can discern if this is a word from the Lord for the whole Body or for an individual, or something specifically for you.

If you are not sure, or insecure about speaking up, you can write it down and give it to the clergy, or have the ushers or acolytes take it to one of the elders. This way we can be obedient to the still small voice of the Lord speaking to the Church.

It is unlikely that any of us will receive a fully formed word. Usually what we hear is a single word, a phrase, a name, or some other simple statement. The Lord wants us to be obedient and speak that, then He will unpack it for us prophetically through our own speaking or through the prophetic utterances of numerous people. Why does He do it this way? Because if He gave us the whole word, we would be tempted to edit or embellish it. Or we might be too frightened by its content to speak it. And He wants to speak. He asks for our obedience. Then when we exhibit that obedience, He releases the full power of His gift in us.

God speaks with a still small voice. But that voice speaks more loudly and boldly than wind, earthquake, or fire. If we are attentive to listen, and obedient to speak, He will release His power and edify His Church.