

Session 4: Eyes to see, ears to hear

Stillness

Take a moment to become still as we begin this session: Assuming you are sitting, but apply this to your current posture, let's do a body scan . . . be aware of your feet on the floor and how they feel . . . of your legs touched by clothes . . . and the chair supporting you . . . your lower back . . . upper back . . . shoulders . . . as you go through, notice if you're carrying any tension and let some of it go . . . your neck . . . head . . . face . . . we often carry tension in our face, so notice if you are and allow more relaxation to come . . . in your forehead . . . around the eyes . . . the jaw . . . the mouth . . . don't try too hard to relax or you won't be relaxed! . . . but come as you are . . .

We will now hear this session's reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

Scripture

(Mathew 13: 10-15)

Then the disciples came and asked him, 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, will more be given, and they will have an abundance but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them.'

Reflection We live in an age of information overload. One unfortunate side-effect of this is that we need to be very selective in what we take notice of, out of the bombardment of messaging that constantly demands our attention. Jesus' reproach could certainly apply to us in our times. Yet today's reading also promises that 'I would heal them'.

In today's world it is genuinely necessary to 'switch off' to a great deal that presents itself, in the media, on social media and even in some personal interactions. Much that swirls around the channels of communication is at best irrelevant or negative, and at worst downright untrue or hate-filled. We need to filter it out, otherwise it can flood our consciousness and influence our choices and actions. As a result, it may well be that our hearts have grown dull, our eyes unseeing and our ears deaf.

However, our companion Inigo is a very practical pilgrim, always able to connect our spiritual vision to our everyday problems. He has a spiritual toolkit which contains an invaluable aid to help us sharpen our perception, focus our inner vision, unblock our inner ears, and open up our hearts to what really matters. This is the tool of spiritual discernment and is a key element of

Ignatian spirituality. Using this tool takes practice – ideally it takes daily practice, using the prayer of the review of the day to notice what we are really seeing, hearing and experiencing in our daily lives, and how we are responding.

The practice of discernment challenges us to see what is often concealed, and hear what is often unspoken, submerged in the tide of information that threatens to overwhelm us. The secret of tuning into this deeper listening and clearer sight is to make a habit of coming to stillness for a while each day, asking for the grace of ears that truly listen, and eyes that see the world through the lens of the heart. How might you nourish the habit of stillness and reflective awareness this week?

The art of discernment is also very much about focus. What we focus on, feeding it by giving it our energy and attention, will grow. What we refuse to feed, by withdrawing our energy and attention from it, will shrink. A simple question therefore is: 'What aspects of our lives and our world do we want to grow and strengthen? We can help this to happen by feeding them with our focused attention. What aspects of ourselves and our world would we want to shrink? We help this to happen by starving them of our energy and attention. Today this is often expressed as 'giving oxygen' to certain issues or people. When we give oxygen to what is life-giving, it grows and thrives. When we give oxygen to what is negative and destructive, it feeds the flames of division and hatred like a forest fire.

Talk to God

The kingdom of heaven in our human lives is a bit like a plant: if it is to grow into the 'better' we long for, we need to feed it and be lovingly aware of what it needs. Or it is like a child. If she is to develop into her full potential, she needs us to feed her inner self by listening to what matters to her and nourishing her with loving attention. We don't feed our houseplants with toxic waste, or our children with hateful gossip. We help them to grow by caring for them and becoming daily more tuned in to what they really need.

How will you feed the kingdom of heaven this week? How will you help it to grow. How will you avoid doing or saying anything that might harm or diminish it?

What has attracted your attention and energy particularly this week? Has it opened your eyes to see something important? Perhaps the loneliness or heartache of a neighbour, or the practical needs of a friend whose livelihood has been destroyed by the pandemic, or the quiet wisdom of an elder you haven't taken time to listen to before?

What have you been hearing this week amid the bustle of busy-ness and the clamour of conflicting news reports? Have you heard the quiet cry of the homeless living on our streets, or the exhausted sighs of overworked health care workers, or the mute desperation of those who are living in deprivation or fear – desperation that is often expressed in the language of rage and fury?

Make a note in your journal of anything you have learned this week to help you make wiser choices and grow your part of God's dream for humanity.



God is longing to heal us of our inner blindness and deafness. Dare we ask for the grace this week to let God open our eyes, our ears and our hearts to see and to understand how we can make personal choices that help the kingdom to grow and humanity to become the best we can be?