

Ways God Speaks

This series of six brief reflections was shared with parish catechetical leaders during the stay-at-home period associated with the Pandemic of 2020. PCLs were encouraged to capitalize on an opportunity for encouraging adults, especially, to deepen their sense of having a genuine, personal, disciple relationship with Jesus—including guidance from Him in the various ways God speaks...

Ways God Speaks: Helping Your Parishioners in Challenging Times

Part 1 of 6 – “You talkin’ to ME?!”

This is the first of several brief, semiweekly tips from your Archdiocesan catechetical director. As the saying goes, “When life sends you lemons, throw them at mean people.” (Oops, I mean, “Make lemonade.”)

Life is throwing us a challenging time. How can we help folks use this time to improve their spiritual health? One way is to help deepen understanding of several key ways that God speaks to each of us in a direct, personal way.

Of the six key ways God speaks (that will be addressed in this series of brief offerings) the one we’ll address first is Sacred Scripture. Let’s help our parishioners understand that when we read and reflect on a Scripture passage each day, we not only learn about God and salvation history, but we also perceive Him reaching out to us in the specific circumstances of our life.

Let’s help all our parishioners grow in the daily habit of reading (or listening) then prayerfully reflecting on at least a brief passage of Sacred Scripture. If even a few of the people we serve are able to experience God communicating to them in a direct way—in the context of an authentically personal relationship with Him—then we will have capitalized on the opportunity for enhanced prayer that our current restrictions present.

Here are a few great resources to call to the attention of your parishioners—helping these folks understand that when they make use what you’re encouraging—they’re opening themselves to direct communication from our loving, saving God:

<https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/online-studies/>

<https://www.agapebiblestudy.com/>

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/understanding-the-bible/index.cfm>

For additional resources and a sample message you could send parishioners (along with the resources) feel free to contact kogorek@archindy.org 😊

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Part 2 of 6 – “Jesus, I trust in you—but please limit your outreach to me.”

It's great that more Catholics are reading the Bible. And it's great that we have resources like the *Catechism* to help us access Sacred Tradition.

But it's tempting to set up a false dichotomy whereby we think that Jesus speaks to us in Sacred Scripture whereas in studying the teaching of the Church we're just learning a bunch of rules and doctrines. “Nay nay!” says the Church!

“Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God’ (*Dei Verbum* 10) in which, as in a mirror, the pilgrim Church contemplates God, the source of all her riches.” (CCC 97)

So...let's help our parishioners understand that when they read and prayerfully reflect on the teaching of the Church, they just might perceive Jesus reaching out to them personally and directly—not entirely unlike what can happen when we incorporate at least a brief Bible passage in our daily reading (or listening). Conversely when we neglect Church teaching in our spiritual habits it's as if we're saying “No, thanks” to one of the key ways that Jesus speaks to our hearts, minds and souls; and who wants to live with that kind of guilt?!

Let's encourage parishioners to use some stay-at-home time for listening to Jesus in the Spirit-guided, authoritative teaching of His Church throughout history, up to and including the present day. And let's be sure to continue sharing good resources for accessing Sacred Tradition; among them:

<http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/>

http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html

<https://watch.formed.org/symbolon-the-catholic-faith-explained>

***For a sample message you could send parishioners along with these (and additional) resources feel free to contact kogorek@archindy.org 😊

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Part 3 of 6 – “Guide my thoughts & feelings, Lord.”

So far we've covered Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition as ways your parishioners can often perceive God reaching out to them personally and directly. Now let's look at prayer—including silence.

The memorized prayers of our Church tell us a lot about God. Sometimes this means they help us discern a path or recognize God’s action in our daily life.

Sometimes just sharing our thoughts and feelings with God—talking things through—can give us clarity on the Lord’s will and presence in real-life situations. Finally, when we ask God to guide our thoughts and feelings—and then allow ourselves to be silent, both internally and externally, for at least several minutes—the Lord will often make His wishes and desires for us known as well as helping us sense His loving presence in our life.

Many of your parishioners are “saying their prayers” throughout these stay-at-home days. And while some of these folks already grasp and practice the depth above, maybe you can help a few more of those you serve experience that Ah-ha moment of knowing that prayer isn’t just reciting words and phrases to God—as good as that is.

Let’s reach out to folks in focused ways at this time, helping parishioners put in to daily practice the reality that prayer is one of the key ways God speaks to us personally and directly in our disciple relationship with Him. Here are some resources you might share:

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html#A\)%20COMMON%20PRAYERS](http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html#A)%20COMMON%20PRAYERS)

<https://ascensionpress.com/products/oremus-a-guide-to-catholic-prayer-online-video-access>

<https://blessedishe.net/blog/catholic-apps/>

<https://watch.formed.org/prayathome>

<https://www.wofdigital.org/prayer>

For additional resources and a sample message you could send parishioners (along with the resources) feel free to contact kogorek@archindy.org 😊

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Part 4 of 6 – Sacraments and sacramental experiences

This one’s a little awkward under the current stay-at-home guidelines. But it bears mentioning—and sharing.

There’s no doubt that sacraments are powerful moments of God reaching out to us—speaking to us, in a sense. When we pay close attention to our thoughts and feelings while celebrating the sacraments, we can encounter God in ways that transform our lives: filling us with joy, showering consolation upon us, granting us clarity about a big decision.

Both when we receive sacraments, and when we participate in celebrating sacraments that others are receiving, God can send us special graces that make His presence and His guidance evident to us. Being present at a Baptism, participating in a Mass where Confirmation is celebrated, witnessing an Anointing of the Sick, being present when the sacrament of Holy Matrimony is received, attending an ordination...all of these are special opportunities to hear God address us personally and directly.

A hunger for the sacraments is building in our people. Many of your parishioners are desiring sacramental grace like never before. Reach out to them and remind them that sacramental opportunities will return, and when access to the sacraments becomes available again, God just might speak to us personally and directly in these experiences—if only we pay close attention in those moments.

Here are some resources to help your parishioners prepare to encounter Jesus—in the context of a personal, disciple relationship with Him—through sacraments and sacramental experiences:

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/index.cfm>

<https://watch.formed.org/the-sacraments-1>

<https://ascensionpress.com/collections/power-and-grace>

<https://ascensionpress.com/collections/hands-of-grace-the-catholic-sacraments-in-american-sign-language>

<https://store.mycatholicfaithdelivered.com/p-3671-foundations-liturgy-and-sacraments.aspx>

***free coupon code: Spring2020

***For a sample message you could send parishioners along with these (and additional) resources feel free to contact kogorek@archindy.org 😊

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Part 5 of 6 – Jesus in Disguise?

Do you believe that God sometimes speaks to us through other people? I usually get resounding Yes when posing that question to various folks.

I used to specify “loved ones” as a primary example of those through whom God can speak to us. But then it dawned on me: What about the stinkers? What about that ornery cuss who gets on your last nerve? What about people you consider a thorn in your side? (I speak from experience as I’m sure I’m a thorn to several folks at times.)

The point is that God can indeed speak to us through other people—sometimes those we least expect. Let’s help our parishioners—many of whom are spending waaay more time around a small number of people than they’re used to—acknowledge that God might be reaching out to them through one or more folks in their life.

Here are some questions to share with those you serve—prompts to help discern when it just might be God speaking through another person:

- What behavior is the person affirming? Is it a way of acting that I’m confident aligns with the guidance of God’s holy Church?
- Is the person pointing out how God might be present and active in a specific situation—connecting some dots between my experiences and God’s traits or ways of working?
- How might the person be helping me understand God more clearly and deeply by sharing information about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that’s new to me or that I’ve not considered in a long time?
- Where in my life is the person challenging me to grow or change? Is that change toward repentance and reconciliation rather than toward sinful behavior as well as distance from God and neighbor?

This is not a complete list. But it can start a process of listening for—and perceiving—our Lord reaching out to us through one or more of His people. For additional thoughts on this topic and a sample message you could send parishioners (along with the thoughts) feel free to contact kogorek@archindy.org 😊

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Part 6 of 6 – Life Happens...and God Speaks!

Does God sometimes have a message for us in the events of our life—both smaller-scale events and larger, maybe worldwide, happenings and occurrences? When we learn to read the signs of the times, we can often perceive guidance, assurance and challenges from almighty God.

Let’s not exaggerate: Every time I stub my toe, it’s not necessarily God saying “Kenneth! In stubbing thy toe thou hast heard an important message from me!”

But sometimes we tend to err toward the other extreme. Sometimes our Lord is hiding in plain sight—in the experience of an illness, in the birth of a grandchild, in a delayed flight or any number of unanswered prayers.

When we pause and prayerfully reflect on life events, in addition to them being typical incidents and occurrences, they can be ways that God makes His presence, guidance and love concrete for us in a direct, personal way.

Let's encourage our parishioners to avoid just letting life happen to them; instead let's help God's people learn ever more deeply how to take life events to prayer—how to say, often, “God, where are You in this experience?” And let us all listen—listen to our Lord reaching out to us in

Sacred Scripture
Sacred Tradition
Prayer, including silence
Sacraments & sacramental experiences
Other people &
Life events

Let us continue helping our parishioners, as catechetical leaders, throughout these challenging times and in all the days God grants us, by His grace and mercy. For a sample message you could send parishioners along these lines feel free to contact kogorek@archindy.org 😊

Epilogue

Several parish catechetical leaders expressed gratitude for these six reflections, mentioning ways the resource was shared with parishioners. In the months ahead, helping parishioners understand how Jesus loves them in a dynamic, personal way will remain a priority—social distancing or not.

*Offices of Catechesis & Evangelization
Secretariat for Worship & Evangelization
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis*