

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time “The God Question”

Fr. Frank Schuster

My friends, one of the greatest privileges of being a priest is that I get to meet with many people, listen to their stories, and sometimes have the opportunity to give spiritual advice. I frequently get requests like, “Father, help me find God.”, “I am looking for God in my life, help me find Him.” The “God question” reflects a most intense hunger in the human heart. It is a hunger to be connected to our Creator and to the very reason for our existence, to find meaning in our lives and to find direction. “Father, help me find God.”

On one level, when I am asked this fundamental question, I can’t help but think of the parable of a younger fish swimming up to an older fish asking the question, “I have heard of this thing called water, can you help me find it?” You see, we are all swimming in this ocean of creation which cannot exist without God sustaining it, and so in a real way, God is everywhere. We simply have to develop the eyes to see and the ears to listen.

On another level, however, how easy it is to live in this world one cup of coffee to the next without realizing that our very lives are the result of God’s providence. We have come from God. We go back to God. While we live, we have the opportunity to grow in God’s image and likeness or not. The search for the meaning in life requires asking questions. What hinders our search for life’s meaning at times is asking the wrong questions out of unrealistic expectations of life. Following Victor Frankl, a survivor of the holocaust who wrote about discovering the meaning of life in a concentration camp, the best question when seeking life’s meaning is not what we expect to get out of life in the future but rather what does life expect out of me right here and right now, wherever I find myself? Those who understood this, according to Frankl, found meaning in their suffering. They were simultaneously more likely to survive than the others because they knew their life wasn’t about them but rather about something more, something transcendent.

And so we have this beautiful reading from the first book of Samuel. Our reading begins, “The young Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the Lord where the ark of God was.” There are several significant points here for those who are seeking a deeper relationship with God. The first basic piece of advice is, try going to the temple of the Lord where God is present. This isn’t to deny that God can be present on a hiking trail or in a garden. But there is something about making that pilgrimage to the “Sacred Temple” where the architecture and the rituals can help lift up our souls to God. In this Church, we have something better than the Ark of the Covenant, a hiking trail or a garden. We have the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Of course, if we do not honor the Sabbath, make Mass a part of our weekly schedule, and make prayer a part of our daily schedule, it is difficult to grow in our relationship with God.

A second piece of advice is that we need to “wake up”. How many people go through life spiritually asleep! If we want to have a relationship with God, we have to be spiritually awake. And although coming to Church or to the holy places is a good spiritual practice, as we see in our first reading it is possible to come to the holy temple and still be asleep. If we want to have a

relationship with God, we have to wake up spiritually. And so, if there is a friend or family member next to you who is asleep right now, please kindly give them a nudge for me.

A third piece of advice for those who wish to grow in their relationship with God is to perhaps consult an elder or spiritual mentor to help discern God's voice. Notice in our first reading, God calls out to Samuel several times, but Samuel needed Eli to help him realize it was God speaking. It says, "Eli understood that the Lord was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, 'If you are called again, reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

And here is yet another great piece of advice if we want to grow spiritually. If we want to have a deeper relationship with God in our prayer life, we must learn how to listen. We must learn how to quiet our heart and give God an opportunity to speak to us. And through the catechesis of the Church, through prayerful meditation and the wisdom of a good spiritual mentor, we can discern that it is indeed God who is speaking to us. We can then respond from the heart, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."

Have you considered that Jesus might have walked by hundreds of people the morning he walked by John the Baptist? It was only John, however, who had the eyes to see Jesus and proclaim to his two disciples, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The Gospel says the two disciples heard what John said and followed Jesus. Notice that these two disciple's initial faith in Jesus came from the spiritual advice they received from their mentor, John the Baptist. This is similar to the way Samuel came to faith in God through the advice of his spiritual mentor, Eli.

What does this mean practically for parents, grandparents, spouses, aunt and uncles, teachers, coaches, priests, or anyone who would like to be a good friend to someone? Never underestimate the influence you have on others by your words and deeds! This holds true especially for parents. One of the reminders I give to parents during our sacramental preparation programs is that the first catechists of children are mom and dad. The first heralds of the Gospel are parents. Never underestimate the importance of going to Mass every Sunday. Never underestimate the importance of mealtime prayers and eating together as family. Never underestimate the importance of bedtime prayers or praying the rosary together as a family. Our first understanding of God usually comes from a mentor we respect, like a parent or relative.

I find it interesting that Simon Peter learns of Jesus from his brother Andrew. The Gospel says, "Andrew tells Peter, 'We have found the Messiah', which is translated, Christ." The Gospel says Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. This is how evangelization happens: a parent, a brother or sister, or a friend or relative invites someone they care about to a relationship with the Lord. They will even make the effort to bring them to Church, so that their friend or relative may be awakened to hear the voice of God in their heart.

Once we have had that encounter with the Lord, life begins to change, doesn't it? "Jesus looked at Simon and said, 'You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas' – which is translated Peter." An encounter with God can be a life changing event. An encounter with God turned a boy named Samuel into one of Israel's greatest prophets. An encounter with the Lord turned a fisherman into the rock on which the Church is built. An encounter with the Lord turned a Pharisee named Saul into the great apostle Paul. Building off of Victor Frankl's insight,

after an encounter with the Lord we can stop asking the useless question, “What do I expect out of God right now or in my future?” We can start asking the far more interesting question, “What does God expect out of me?”