



Many a time in my years following God, I have found myself complaining. “Why don’t you speak more clearly? What is up with this? I mean you are God! Things would be simpler if you would just tell me what you want or what I am doing wrong or what I have to do next!” But then there is always silence, often filled with frustration.

**Most of the time God seems distant—about as distant as the Big Dipper.** Sure, we believe he is out there, but he does not enter my life. He does not make things happen. He doesn’t make a difference, at least not as I expect him to.

I come across many people who confide to me their gradual loss of faith. “I pray, but I don’t feel anything. It doesn’t seem to matter. It’s like I am talking to a wall. If God had something to say to me, I think he would tell me.”

**God’s silence makes believing difficult. Why he doesn’t make himself heard is a legitimate question.** After all, he is all powerful. It is not as if he is having a hard time figuring out how to reach us.

They say God speaks without ceasing. **If that is true and we don’t hear him, we aren’t listening.** My medieval philosophy professor used to repeat over and over that **if God stopped “speaking out” the world, it would cease to exist just like when I stop pushing air through my vocal chords, my voice falls silent.** What theology calls *creatio continua*—the fact that God’s creation is not a one-time act but a continuous holding in existence—means that he is indeed continuously speaking (CCC 301). To know what he is saying, we must listen. That is what silence is all about.

Not to beat a dead horse, but I still ask myself, “Why does God make me listen attentively? Why does he require of me such effort? He could make things so much more obvious! If he is really there, why doesn’t he show it?”

In the first place, he doesn’t always wait for us to pay attention to reveal himself. Michael is a tattoo-covered biker from the Midwest. He admits he’s an alcoholic and sometimes uses drugs. His multiple near death experiences and accidents never made him question

his lifestyle until he bought a mirror from a pawnshop.

It was an interesting artifact with a curious engraving of a woman in the center. The engraving is what caught his attention. It turns out the image is of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and one day Michael heard a voice.

“I have not brought you this far to lose you now!” it said. Not sure what to make of it, Michael started investigating. He soon came across a flyer for a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. The only problem was it cost \$3,000.

“I would go, but I don’t have that kind of money,” he thought. A few days later at the VFW bingo night, Michael won the pot--it was exactly \$3,000. “I haven’t brought you this far to lose you now.” God can speak loud and clear if he wants. Michael went to Medjugorje.

That is exactly how we would like God to speak to us: loud and clear. **But most of the time he makes us listen, and the apparent silence can be frustrating, discouraging, and dark.** To the humble and simple heart God’s voice is perceptible even then.

Attitudes of the heart are what determine our capacity to listen. When you ask with humility you find an answer. A few years ago I was going through several months of spiritual darkness. I can’t even remember where the discouragement was coming from. Everything was difficult. Believing in God seemed to require either superhuman effort or incredible stupidity. As I clung to shreds of faith out of sheer stubbornness, the gloom only thickened. One day I started asking myself, “What can possibly come of this? **If God is there, why on earth would he leave me like this?**” **For some reason, I started to work through the problem as if it were a mental experiment. “Let’s assume God is there. Given that God loves me, what would he be trying to do in me or elicit from me in this situation?”** As I pondered, I felt a change begin to take place in me.

If God loves me and allows me to suffer his silence, there must be a reason for it. If God loves me, he is seeking my good. But God gave me the capacity to choose, so there must be some choice, decision, or reaction that he is leading me to. Hence my good consists--according to God--in something I am supposed to do in the midst of spiritual darkness: trust him. In fact, this darkness provides an environment for me to make a very special act of trust. I have nothing to go on! In these circumstances I can make an act of faith and trust in God which is impossible in any other circumstances. And that is a gift!

All of a sudden peace began to return to my soul. It made sense. What had changed? I was still in a sort of darkness. Nothing in my situation was significantly altered. But my

attitude had changed. When I cried out to God, “Why are you doing this?” I began to cry out with humility. Instead of reproaching him for not behaving according to my expectations, I was putting his action in the center and listening.

**Humility, detachment, and openness are the attitudes that enable us to hear God’s voice. His predilection for the poor and simple applies to all of us. When humble yourself, his voice becomes audible.**

Conversion--a change of heart--is what God seeks. His silence is nothing more than a constant call to conversion. Indeed, it is not silence at all, but a gentle and persistent invitation to trust.