

Far from the madding crowd

A few years ago in one of his talks to priests, the late Pope John Paul II (now a canonised saint) cautioned them not become so immersed in the work of the Lord that they overlook the Lord of the work.

The spiritual life is as much about taking time out to be with the Lord in private prayer and meditation as it is about performing works of charity which of course is a very good thing in itself, but not the full picture.

Schoolchildren are taught how to raise money for good causes – the Good Shepherd Fund is a good example. This should be balanced, however, with teaching them how to imbibe the Word of God in the classroom through reflective reading of scripture, followed by prayer and silence so that they can get to know the Lord in a personal way. This will in turn enhance their participation in the Mass and help them participate in it at a deeper level.

The First Reading from Samuel also brings out this same point, when he said, "speak Lord, your servant is listening". So, listening to the Lord in prayer is as important as speaking or acting. How easy it is to twist Samuel's words around and say the opposite: "listen, Lord, your servant is speaking".

Blessed Mother Theresa always insisted that her nuns must spend an hour in prayer each morning before they visit the poorest of the poor. Otherwise they may not see Christ in these needy people.

The Gospel today is the story of the Lord calling the first apostles. However, before he did this the scriptures tell us that he spent the whole previous night in prayerful dialogue with His Father.

Activism or being overly active can be a stumbling block to growth in the life of the spirit and yet it is prized highly by the world. Pharaoh, who enslaved the Israelites instructed his slavedrivers: "Make these slaves work harder, so that they have no time to listen" to God or Moses who intends to free them.

If we listen to the Lord we will know what to do and when to do it. What do we read in today's Psalm: "you do not ask for sacrifice and offerings but an open ear" which is coupled with: "here I am Lord; I come to do your will". It seems to suggest that listening with the heart is a vital first

step to entrusting our whole selves into His hands and doing His Will.

So let us open our ears and hearts more earnestly to the Lord so that we can be His trusted disciples and like Samuel say with confidence – "here I am Lord, your servant is listening – I am ready to do your Will".

QUESTIONS

1. Do we need to teach children these days how to cultivate an inner silence or stillness amid the noise and din of the world? Scripture says: 'be still and know that I am God'. Discuss
2. Charity work is to be lauded but is there a danger that we will reduce the Christian faith to raising money for the poor and forget about the contemplative side of our faith without which charity work can be just another form of ego-tripping? Discuss
3. Christ is present in his Word (Vatican 11). Do we treat it with the same reverence as the Eucharistic species where Christ is also present? Are we still treating the first part of the Mass as less important than the second? Discuss
4. What does it mean to you to listen with the heart?