

To hear God's voice, you have to listen

By Father Joseph Breighner

As I write this column, the events around the Boston Marathon are still unfolding. Allow me to share a true story.

I know a couple from Minnesota, Darlene and Ron. Darlene is my official hair cutter. Unbeknownst to them, however, their nephew and his wife from Minnesota were running that marathon. As they approached the finish line, he said to his wife: "Let's run a couple of blocks past the finish line. That way we won't get caught up in all the crowd." As they ran those two blocks, they heard the first of two explosions. Had they stopped at the finish line, they might have been part of the casualties.

Why, after running 26.2 miles, would the thought occur to them to run two additional blocks? In John's Gospel Jesus assures us that "My sheep will hear my voice." To hear God's voice, however, we have to be listening for that voice.

This is not an occurrence just for special people. Jesus assures us in that same Gospel that no one can take us out of his hands. No one can take us out of the Father's hands. "The Father and I are one." It can be comforting for us at all times, despite whatever tension or tragedy we may be experiencing, to know that God is holding us.

And can't we all remember times when we've had some kind of similar experience? Haven't we hesitated when the light turned green, and suddenly a car races through the red light from the other direction? Had we gone forward when the light changed, we might have been killed. Why did we hesitate? Did we know something? Did we hear a voice?

My point here is that religion is not just something for the mystical. Religion is for all of us. Whenever we love, we are listening to God.

And that is my second point. God doesn't just hold us. We hold God. I love the part of the reading from the Acts of the Apostles where Paul and Barnabas are persecuted and expelled from the town, and it says that they were "filled with joy and the Holy Spirit!" Holy cow. How can you be filled with joy when you're being manhandled? Were they masochists? Or were they simply Christians who know that we are both are held by God and that we hold God?

Jesus assured us that the Kingdom of God is within us. Most of us look for our happiness somewhere else. The world conditions us to believe that we will find happiness if we had more money, or if we had another car, or if we had a bigger house, or if we had another relationship, or if we had the latest computer or gadget,

and on and on. The world tells us that the kingdom of God is out there. Jesus tells us that the Kingdom is within us. And Jesus promised a joy that no one could take from us!

That's why we need to take time to go within to find the God always present within. It's comforting to know that God holds us. That gives us a sense of safety. It's inspiring to know that we hold God. When you and I love and give and care and bring joy to others, it's the presence of God within us that brings the love and care and joy.

Heaven isn't something we have to wait for. Heaven can be our present internal experience. The world was falling apart for Paul and Barnabas. They were rejected by civil authorities and religious authorities and even their own people, yet they still knew joy and the Holy Spirit.

Yes, it's comforting to have a vision of heaven which is why the Book of Revelations was written - to offer a vision of eternal happiness after those days of sadness and persecution. But we need to remember that we don't have to drop our bodies to go to heaven. Heaven is within us always. There is joy and peace and love within us that the world can't give. Heaven begins when we focus on the reality that in life and in death, we belong to God.

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