

# Yanny vs. laurel

Our senses often deceive us. The recent “yanny vs. laurel” debate on the internet saw those who heard the word “laurel” arguing with those who heard the word “yanny” when listening to a vocabulary.com recording of the word “laurel.”

Very reasonable people had rather intense disagreements about what they were hearing. (I heard “laurel” and my son heard “yanny.” We simply had to agree to disagree.)

It may seem like a trivial dispute, but like most things that garner so much cultural attention, something deeper was at work. Yanny vs. laurel is about how our senses can be tricked by subtle changes in acoustic frequencies, but it is also about how we have a strong desire to know what is true.

And we will try to persuade others even though they are incapable of hearing what we are hearing because of the way they happen to process the signal.

The same might be said of our faith. The line between belief and doubt is often a matter of proper interpretation. Was Christ just a moral teacher who wanted us to be kinder to each other or was he also the Son of God, willing to suffer death to atone for our sins? If we believe the latter, how do we come to know it? And why do others fail to believe it? Our interpretive ability comes from the gift of divine grace that shapes our perception and illuminates our understanding.

Perception is shaped first by the senses. St. Paul tells us that faith comes by hearing. Our Lord said, “Whoever has ears ought to hear,” following the parable of the sower in the Gospel of Matthew. In both cases, hearing is given a special place.

Why is this? Was it simply a technological limitation of the time because nearly all communication was oral? Or is there something peculiar about hearing that makes it a privileged sense for perceiving faith?

The church’s newest feast, that of Mary, Mother of the Church, provides a clue. How is it that Mary received Christ into her womb? By hearing the word of God and assenting to it. As then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger explained, “Mary welcomes the

Holy Spirit into herself. Having become pure hearing, she receives the Word so totally that it becomes flesh in her.”

Stephen Beale writes about this as well and points out that it is the liturgy where the fullness of hearing is experienced. We hear God’s word, but we also receive him bodily under the species of bread and wine. And it doesn’t stop there. We are transformed by this communion, attuned to God’s grace and prepared to exercise our theological senses of faith, hope and charity in the world by proclaiming the Gospel.

All of our senses are engaged in the Mass, but hearing is first. The Liturgy of the Word precedes the Liturgy of the Eucharist because our hearts must be tuned to God’s frequency before we receive him in the Eucharist. The external senses must give way to something internal — where real conversion takes place.

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