

Archbishop Smith: Bingo!

Over the weekend, I dropped into a seniors' centre. As I entered the complex, I quickly found myself in a rather perilous situation. I had to walk by a group of residents who were playing bingo. Now, I've learned from hard experience that the last thing you ever want to do is distract the attention of bingo players as they listen for the numbers to be called out. The slightest rustle will be met with "Shhhh!" and a glare! Having been so chastened more than once, I stayed very quiet and made it past the group unnoticed, taking care later to leave by the back door.

There is a lesson for us in that rapt attention of those bingo players. Their sole concern was to listen to the voice of the caller, to the point of being intolerant of even the slightest distraction. Well, there is another "caller", to whose voice we must attend with at least equal concentration. That is Jesus, the Good Shepherd, whose sheep hear and listen to his voice (John 10:27-30). Implicit here is the expectation that we, as "sheep", or disciples, give our entire attention to hearing his call, and take great care not to allow other voices or noise to distract us.

That's not easy. Each of us deals with inner noise – desires, disappointments, fears etc. – that crowd our thinking. Add to this the multiplicity of exterior babble that reaches us through modern means of communication and we appreciate quickly how wide-ranging are the distractions that lure us away from attentiveness to the voice of the caller.

The stakes here are high – very high. When Jesus calls, he directs his voice to each individual person and speaks "words of everlasting life" (John 6:68). When we attend to the voice of this caller, we find not only consolation and hope along the way of this earthly journey, not only the particular purpose for which each of us has been created, but also the path that leads to life eternal!

How do we listen without distraction? This takes deliberation and practice. People will find different ways to make time, first of all, for God's Word and then to focus and be attentive. Allow me to share with you one great idea that I learned in the course of a parish visit on Sunday. In a meeting with parishioners, we were speaking of my pastoral letter and its call to be grounded daily in the Word of God. One woman told the group that, since she likes to be reading something while she eats breakfast, she decided to replace the newspaper with the Bible. Now, she says, she reads Scripture as she eats her porridge. Why didn't I think of that?! It's a terrific example of how it is possible, in the midst of a busy day, to make time to listen with attention to the voice of the caller. A mundane routine gets replaced with a sacred one, and both light and meaning burst into the day.

The Holy Spirit is given to the Church precisely to draw us into the Word and grant understanding. So, in our desire to listen to the voice of the divine caller, let's pray for the grace of close and careful attention that is intolerant of any distraction. After all, there is much more at issue here than a number on a bingo card.