

Archbishop Smith: OK Google! Hey Siri!



Now this is something I don't think I'll ever understand. How it works is totally beyond me.

Whether it is a smartphone or a special device for the house, one can now simply speak to these things and they respond with the answers sought or actions requested.

This fascinating computerized voice recognition and response technology raises important questions: am I able to recognize the voice of God when He speaks? When I do, how responsive am I to what God asks of me?

The urgency of reflecting on these questions is dramatically underscored by current circumstances, which demonstrate the harm that arises when God's Word is unrecognized and unheeded.

Globally we see this in the numberless refugees fleeing persecution, unresolved conflicts in the Middle East, aggression in Ukraine, and tensions in North Korea.

Closer to home we continue to live with affronts to the dignity of innocent human life, growing drug crises, particularly among the young, situations of dire poverty and homelessness, family dysfunction and so on.



At each marking of a New Year the yearning in every heart for an end to all of this and for the establishment of order and peace rises to the surface.

The Church marks the New Year as the World Day of Peace, and responds to this deep desire with the sure affirmation that the peace we seek is possible if we but recognize the voice of God and do as He commands.

Recognition of God's voice is possible.

In the Christmas season, the Church proclaims that God's Word has become flesh in Jesus born of the Virgin Mary (*cf. John 1:14*). By hearing the words of Jesus, we recognize the voice of God.

Yet, while the recognition is made possible by God, our culture renders it rather difficult.

How so? Well, consider that, in order for me to use today's technology properly, my voice needs to be clearly heard. If my voice is garbled or there is background noise, I might very well get from the device answers to questions I am not asking.

God's voice, speaking to us in Christ, is crystal clear. Yet today there is plenty of background noise.

We live in a culture of chatter and babble, in a time when a multiplicity of voices bombards us daily. In the midst of this static, it can be very difficult to recognize the voice of our Lord. We can end up shaping answers to questions that God is not asking.

What is required, therefore – and here is a New Year's resolution worth keeping – is a determination to close out from our minds and hearts all noise we know is contrary to the Gospel and seek God's grace to help us truly recognize the voice of Jesus speaking to us in Scripture and the Church and echoing within our conscience.



Yet recognition in itself is insufficient. God's Word calls for a response.

Our world is obviously not doing very well on that score, so we need to pay special attention to the one to whom the Church directs our gaze every January 1st, the one whose response to God's Word was perfect: Mary, the Mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Regarding the words about her newborn son spoken by shepherds, we are told that

she “treasured and pondered” all she heard (*cf. Luke 2:19*).

This means that she thought deeply about everything pertaining to her son and delighted in it as not only his mother but also his disciple. She gave herself over completely to the task of understanding God’s Word, spoken about Jesus and in Jesus, in order to be completely obedient to it.

Here we find in Mary the example we are called to imitate, that we urgently need to follow in these troubled times.

In a world where discourse is increasingly shaped by Twitter, Snapchat, Google and Siri we are rapidly losing the capacity to listen and ponder, to take time to treasure words and allow them to sink in.

There are no words more beautiful and wondrous, there is nothing uttered more worthy of our trust, than God’s Word, spoken in Jesus Christ.

The way to the peace for which we long is that of recognizing the voice of God speaking in Jesus, and then of responding to it by treasuring, pondering and obeying God’s Word, just as Mary, the mother of God and mother of the Church, teaches us to do.