

The Divine Whisper

Discernment in the life of Catherine McAuley

1 Listening

Discernment is about making good decisions, rather than decisions that suit our own immediate purpose. It means aligning our wills with God's. But how do we know what God's will is? At moments of indecision, people look for signs, hoping that God will tell them what to do. Discernment, however, is a way of life, so that, when we do come to a 'crossroads' in our lives, we are accustomed to following where Christ leads. *'Morning by morning he wakens my ear to listen,'* said the Prophet Isaiah. He was referring to the 'ears of the heart.'

God speaks to our hearts in all sorts of ways, usually through scripture, the Church, and other people, but we need time on our own if we are to hear that 'still, small voice.' Reflecting on the events of each day, we learn to detect the Spirit's movement in our lives. We need to listen, too, to what is going on inside us, recognising the things that may hold us back, inviting God to help us and allowing him to do so.

A 'listening' heart needs to be receptive to the voice of loving challenge. It is why people often desire to spend time alone... yet find all sorts of excuses for not doing so! Deep down, they know that an encounter with God leaves no-one unchanged. It is an encounter with Love, with Truth. We may both desire it and avoid it.



Let us take encouragement from Catherine McAuley, who taught her Sisters to love what she called 'the hidden life.' Her companion, Sister Vincent Harnett, wrote of her:

"besides private meditations, she used to rise earlier than the rest to say her favourite prayer and read some spiritual book... Fidelity to the inspiration of grace was a lesson she frequently and earnestly taught, showing how important it was that Sisters should listen attentively to that divine voice which silently and constantly whispers in the heart..."

'Fidelity to the inspiration of grace.' Try to unpick the meaning of that phrase. What might it involve in practice?

How attentive am I to 'that divine voice' which silently and constantly whispered in the heart of Catherine McAuley?