

# Sensitivity

Transcription of Wednesday Midweek Fellowship – Fr. Gary Thurman

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Cathedral of the King

Transcribed by: Sis. Ting Librojo

**Midweek Fellowship**  
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**"Sensitivity"**

**Fr. Gary W. Thurman**

I spend a lot of time reading billboards and T-shirts. I am a person who likes to read, but unfortunately, I don't read too many books except for the Bible. I have never found a book that is half interesting and half as uplifting and profitable as the Bible. If somebody took the trouble to make the T-shirt and print the billboard, and if somebody took the trouble to put on the T-shirt that day, it is meant to be read, right? I always read every T-shirt that walks by me every day. I always read every billboard that I see when I am commuting around.

I saw a T-shirt where it was printed: if you listen, God will speak. I thought, "It was nice that somebody would devote their chest to the Lord and say, 'Here, Lord, take this space and say on it what You want to say.'" Thinking about the message, I thought that it should be the other way around. God speaks all the time. He doesn't wait for us to listen for Him to speak to us. He is always speaking. The question is, "Do we listen or not?"

God is always speaking; calling to His people. What He speaks is according to basically how we respond, but He always speaks, waiting for us to listen. Many times when I commute, I take the PNR and go down in Magallanes. At Mantrade, there is a popular jeepney stop and there is an audio that tells you the different stops that the jeep will take. The guy has a nice, relaxing voice and every time I would go there, he is always saying the same things. I thought, "This guy's voice is amazing. He never really gets tired. He is always speaking, but he never gets a sore throat saying the same thing over and over again." One day, a thought came to me that maybe, it is a recording for wherever you go, the guy is always speaking and never loses his voice.

This is the way the Lord is. He is always speaking to us. He doesn't wait for us to listen to Him; He is speaking, but we do need to listen. It is not the issue on whether or not God is speaking. The issue is: do we listen?

There is a passage in the Bible that is listed 16 times in the New Testament - eight times in the Book of Revelation and eight times, it is Jesus Himself speaking in the gospel. The verse is: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." What is Jesus talking about? In Matthew 13:16, Jesus says, "Blessed are your ears because they hear." Of course, if we've got ears, so what are we going to do with it? Jesus is talking about really listening, not just hearing the noise and paying attention. It is one thing to hear; it is something else to pay attention. When Jesus says, "Let he who has ears to hear, let him hear," He is saying, "Really pay attention to the noise that is going on."

We have bad habits. Sometimes we say, "How are you?" And the person will automatically say, "I am good," and we say, "Oh, that is great." For some reason we say, "Hey, how are you?" The person would answer, "It is my worst day ever. I think I am going home and shoot myself," and we say, "Okay, great, see you later." We don't really listen to what people are saying. We hear noise, but we don't listen.

When Jesus says, “Let he who has ears to hear, let him hear,” make sure you listen and pay attention, and blessed are you if your ears actually hear what is going on. There is a lot of noise in the world today; a lot of things to divert our attention. There are a lot of apps on the phone that you see people never in a place of quiet. On a bus, standing in a queue, sitting in a restaurant, people are always looking for something. There is never a time that people just listen and be quiet for a while. Because of this, I believe that our spiritual lives are poorer. Maybe many times, God is trying to speak, but we are not hearing because our attention is elsewhere. We are not being sensitive to the voice of God because so many other things are wrestling for our attention.

I believe that this is what the Parable of the Sower is all about. This parable is given by all three evangelists – Matthew, Mark and Luke – and it is kind of unusual because many times, when a parable is told by more than one evangelist, it sounds a little bit different from one to the other. The Parable of the Sower is very consistent in the three evangelists in the things that introduce the parable and the words that come after the parable, which is quite unusual. I heard people say before that it shouldn’t be called the Parable of the Sower, but the Parable of the Soils because it is all about the four different types of soils. I have thought about that before, but actually, Jesus said, “Hear then the parable of the Sower.” Jesus called it the Parable of the Sower and that should probably be good enough for us.

In one of the gospels about the parable, Jesus says, “Hear this,” and He gives the parable. In all three parables, there is something in between the parable and the explanation; but when Jesus gives the explanation, He always says, “Hear then what the parable means.” In Luke, Jesus says, “I am telling you in parables because to you, it is given the mysteries of the kingdom of God that you may hear.” To others, they don’t get the understanding because they are like what Isaiah says, “You have ears, but you don’t hear.” This is the reverse of what Jesus encouraged His followers to say. He said, “Those beside the road are those who have heard. But then the devil came and took it away.” In other words, they heard noise, but they did not pay attention. They didn’t realize what they just heard. They didn’t realize the great thing that they possessed in their understanding, so it meant nothing and it was gone and the devil took it away. They may be listening, they heard the noise, but they did not pay attention. They were not sensitive to those things that they heard.

Jesus said, “Those in the rocky soil are those who that when they hear, receive the Word with joy, but they don’t have firm roots.” They believe for a while, but in time of temptation, they fall away. Something else gets their attention; something tempts them. Whatever their weakness is – a temptation of the flesh or to serve self or whatever might be - they lose their sensitivity to the Word that they heard. The Word does not profit them because they did not hear it with the heart that was listening and paying attention and being sensitive. They got distracted by temptation, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the desires of life. As a result, they missed out. They did not receive the blessings that Jesus said, “If you have ears to hear, you really will be blessed, but if you are easily distracted, you are going to miss out.”

Jesus said, “The seed, which fell among the thorns, those who have heard, but as they go on their way, they choked with worries, with riches, and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to maturity.” Again, they heard, but they got distracted by one of the multitude of voices that are out there in the world today. So many things are out there crying for our attention and they distract us from being sensitive to the word of God that we should be hearing.

In the last group of soil, Jesus said, “The seed in the good soil, the ones who have heard the Word in an honest and good heart and hold it fast.” They focus their attention; they don’t wander into something else; they hold onto what they have heard; so they are the ones that are fruitful – a thirty, sixty, a hundred fold.

The whole point of the parable and all three evangelists brings this out is: Do you hear? Do you hold onto what you hear? Do you pay attention to it? Are you sensitive to it? Luke 8:16-18 reinforce the issue of hearing. In verse 17, it says, “*For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Therefore, take care how you listen; for whatever you have, more will be given.*” When you listen, God will give you more. Whatever it is that He is speaking to you – comfort, exhortation, revelation, direction, understanding – He will give you more when you listen. But if you don’t listen, if you don’t hear, even what He is trying to give you, it will be gone.

The whole point of the parable is: listening and being sensitive. It is hard to listen when you are constantly being distracted by so many voices, with so many things. There are always things out there looking for your attention and many of them are opposite of what the Lord would want us to hear. We have to learn to listen; we have to learn to ask the Lord.

A few weeks ago, my family and I were in the process of moving out from where we were staying. I was looking at my situation and on one Saturday morning, at pre-dawn, I was lying awake thinking, “We have so many things that we have to do. There are so many things that I have to pack up. There are so many logistics that I’ve got to take care of. I don’t even know what to do first, and we haven’t really found a place to move in.” I was really anxious, and I remembered the Scriptures, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, make your request known to God and the peace of God, which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds.” I prayed this and said, “Lord, what do I do? I’ve got these many things and they are more than I could handle. Which is the most important?”

I listened and the Lord spoke, “This particular thing, you need to handle. Do this in the morning as soon as you wake up and as soon as you have your morning time with me. Get up and you do that.” I said, “Okay, Lord.” Then, there was something wrong and got unfunctioned in the house, and the Lord said, “Fix that. Take care of that,” and I did. The funny thing was that as soon as I took care of it, I had a call from the landlord saying, “Somebody is coming to look at the place today.” I thought she meant that somebody was coming to look at the place and see if they could rent it. Actually, it was one of her people doing an inspection to make sure it was in good condition. If I did not hear from the Lord about fixing something that was broken, it would have been a bad thing touching on our security deposit. But because the Lord spoke, and I listened, I was able to take care of it and it was a blessing to me.

This is a simple example of what we are talking about. Every day, we should pray, “Lord, what do I do first today?” This is sensitivity. This is one level or common level, which we talk about that we know as Christians. There is another level of sensitivity to the Lord, which is very important that we don’t pay much attention to. This is in the area of our evangelism, in the area of our relations with others. Are we really sensitive not only to the voice of the Lord, but to others around us? The Lord will let us know if there is something that He wants us to do for the person to our left, to our right or to whomever. After all, we are the servants of the Lord and as servants of the Lord, one of the things that we do is serve those around us. How do we do that? Do we just make it up? Do we take a wild guess? If we are sensitive to the Spirit, we can know how we can be a blessing to others.

In 2Corinthians 5:20, it says that we are ambassadors for the kingdom of God. *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”* We are literally royal ambassadors. We are ambassadors for the kingdom of God. There is something about being the ambassador. He has to be very, very sensitive to the one who has appointed him, in the country that he is serving. He doesn’t get to say what he thinks and what he feels. The role of the ambassador is to tell those in the country where he is, what those who hired him and those who appointed him think.

I remember once when the United States had an ambassador in our country years ago and he kept saying all sorts of things and I thought, “Oh, are you really an ambassador for the U.S. and you said that?” It wasn’t long that he was sent home as he was not being a good representative of the U. S. As an ambassador, you are an accurate representative of the country you are serving. If you are a royal ambassador of Jesus Christ, an ambassador of the kingdom of God, you must be sensitive to what the Lord wants to say to those in the country where you are serving. The country that we are serving is planet earth. Literally, we are serving God in the kingdoms of this world, in this realm. We are showing and teaching them what life is like in the kingdom of God, and what our King says about whatever situation or whatever our King wants to do for that person that we are interacting with.

This takes sensitivity. An ambassador must uniquely be able to be sensitive to the will of the one who appointed him. He has to be very sensitive and able to express only what he is told to express and to do only what they want him to do. We think that the life of an ambassador is party all the time, but actually, these are just the venues that they use to express the values and the desires of those people whom he is serving.

As ambassadors for the kingdom of God, our message is to be reconciled to God. This is God’s heart for those in the world that we come across. It is what the Patriarch likes to say – the least, the lost, and the lonely. Our message is to be reconciled to God and we must be sensitive to how God wants us to be reconciled to Him. We are here to serve the Lord and those whom we meet, just like ambassadors.

The way we serve is to be sensitive. “Lord, what do You want me to do? How can I share reconciliation with the people around me? How can I share sensitivity to the least, the lost and the lonely because sometimes, the least, the lost and the lonely are not the kind of people that we would want to hang on with. They are not the kind of people that you would want to talk to. They are not the kind of people that you want to make friends with. “He is the least, how can he help me?” “He is lost, I don’t want to follow him. I will get lost too.” “He is lonely. Lonely people are needy. They are clingy, and I don’t want to be anywhere with that guy.” Yet, these are the ones the Lord says, “Let them know that they have been reconciled to Me.” It takes sensitivity on our part to see that. It is not just like our own desires, focusing on ourselves, but listening to God’s voice.

I have been learning this myself personally and recently. For more than a year, ever since we started having office in this building, I have been taking a bus from my place to this place. When I get on the bus, the first thing that I do is to find a nice, empty seat, next to the window and turn around and look out the window as the bus goes all the way here. This is kind of crazy because half the year, it is dark out there and you can’t see what is out there, but I still look out the window in the dark. The other thing is, every day for more than a year and a half, nothing really changes out the window. Once in a while, there are

changes in the billboard. Nothing changes, but there is where my focus would be – out the window where it is the same thing, day after day after day.

One day, in my heart, I thought, “Why are you there giving your focus and your attention to something that never changes?” Do you know what changes every day? It is the people *in* the bus. They are different daily. This is what you can focus your sensitivity on. Instead of looking out the window, why not at least face the person who is sitting next to you rubbed up against you in the crowded bus. After all, you are their ambassador. They are there to let them know about the reconciliation they have in the kingdom of God.

I began to turn my attention not out of the window, to the same things I see everyday hundreds of times, but to the people I have never seen before. Early in the morning, it is pretty much a blue-collar bus, a worker’s bus, where most of them go to a construction workplace. I began to pray and to be sensitive how to pray. Every morning, I pray for those on the bus. “Lord, as we are all going to our jobs, give us today a good day’s return for a good day’s work. Lord, give us safety today (because a lot of people are working on dangerous jobs.) Lord, give us protection today and help us to return home to our families. And Lord, give us an awareness today of Your favour. Lord, I pray for everybody on this bus that somewhere they see Your hand at work in their lives. May they see Your goodness in the world.” I began to pray these things on the bus every day.

Sometimes, when the driver is driving like a maniac, I pray for the driver. One time, it was for sure that we were going to have an accident before we go to Bicutan because I believe the driver was on something to keep him awake after driving for so long. He was driving like a mad man, and I began to pray for him because I was pretty sure we wouldn’t make it to Bicutan. As I prayed for him, he began to calm down. He stopped tailgating; he stopped driving all over the place.

It is our role to be sensitive to those around us. It is a price to be paid. When you talk about the cost of discipleship, part of the cost is that you just don’t zone out or take out your attention on something that is not important. It is a matter of being sensitive to everything that is going on around you, and sensitive to your role as an ambassador in the kingdom of God.

I have learned that people just want to know that somebody cares. If you turn your face from the window and turn your face towards people, you will be shocked; they will be shocked. People just want to know that somebody cares. If you take the time to just give them a smile and say, “How are you?” “Where is your work today?” it makes all the difference in the world. It is easier to do this when you are in the nine o’clock bus where everybody is looking good in their Giordano or Chanel with fancy briefcases all the way to their white-collar jobs. When it is a blue-collar job or a crowd where you are not exactly sure where they have been or where they are going, it is different; but isn’t this the least, the lost and the lonely? Perhaps, we may be making snap judgments, but it could be. If we are sensitive to the Lord, we will know.

One of the primary examples I am reminded of being sensitive to the Lord is in 2Kings 5. This is the story of Naaman, the Syrian, who was a commander of the Syrian army and who was the enemy of the Jewish people. The Syrians were like bands of Nomadic raiders and they would go to different Israelites cities and have commando rage. They steal stuffs and take captives. Naaman had kidnapped a Jewish girl and made her his slave. Imagine that she had been living her life of a free person, with her family and she was

kidnapped and made a slave in a household. In other words, Naaman was not the friend of this Jewish girl.

Probably, the typical reaction was to focus on self. “I am so sad. I am so depressed. I used to have a life. Now, I am just a slave. I used to be free. I used to enjoy so many things, now, I am just a slave in this man’s house and I have to work so hard. There is no pleasure in my life. I miss my family. I am sitting with this man who is an enemy of my people and an enemy of my God. I hate my life!” This was not the focus of the young girl. Instead, she was sensitive to the needs of the man who kidnapped her.

This is an eye-opener! Basically, the Jewish girl was sensitive to her enemy and his needs. She said, “What does my enemy need? He needs healing. I will keep that secret because if anybody doesn’t deserve healing, it is this Naaman guy.” Her attitude was, “Master, I understand that you are suffering. Leprosy is a horrible disease and there is hope. The God of my people; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has a prophet in Israel and this prophet can heal your disease. You have a need and I have sensed that need, and I am here to tell you that as an ambassador of the kingdom of God, there is hope and there is healing for you if you can contact the prophet Elijah.” Naaman was not the friend of the Jewish girl. He was her archenemy; the man who have wronged her; hurt her; kidnapped her; and yet, her heart was, “How can I help you? How can I bring you to a higher level of life, to a closer contact with the kingdom of God?”

Personally, this is confrontational to me. I asked myself, “Will I do that?” I am not sure I like the answer if I am honest with myself. I believe the Lord has this in the Scripture for us as a challenge to us. If we want to expand our evangelical effort, if we want to expand our success in evangelism, one of the things we need to do is to learn to be sensitive to those around us. Don’t just throw off memorized speech, “Hi, do you know the Lord Jesus Christ? He died for you. There are four spiritual laws....” This is not really connecting with them.

Effective evangelism is first of all caring for people. Have the heart for the least, the lost and the lonely. Second, it is being sensitive. Hearing and paying attention to the voice of the Lord, “Lord, what can I bring to this person from Your throne?” This is what the little servant did and it changed the life of Naaman and his heart. At the end of the story, Naaman was saying to Elijah, “Lord, I got this problem. I know that there is no other God except for the God of Israel, but sometimes, when my master leans on me, and when we are in the temple of his god, I can’t help myself. Please forgive me.” He was already apologizing for being in an idol’s temple. It was a big change in the life of Naaman because one little girl said, “My master has a need. I discern and I sense that the need is there.”

As we have been talking for the past weeks about evangelism and how to share the gospel to others, the key is sensitivity; listening to the Lord. Shut up the world for a while; shut up everything for a while. The Lord is speaking always and there is always an opportunity to minister to somebody. The question is: are we sensitive? Do we hear? Do we listen? Or do we say, “I will just entertain myself now.”

This is a challenge and I believe that this is what the Lord wants us to learn and to flow in. The song says, “Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus. To reach out and touch Him and say that we love Him. Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen. Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.”