

How can we know what God is saying to us?

A lot of the people we live among do not believe that God will ever speak to them, any more than they think the Queen will.

But God speaks to all of us without exception, We need our minds to be tuned to his way of communication. And it's not easy.

This isn't because God is secretive or sulking, like another human being who is selfishly hiding his feelings from us. It's because human beings don't have what it takes to comprehend the life of God. We aren't big enough, our minds at their greatest are too small, too time-bound, and too inexperienced. We can grasp things that are smaller than we are, if they're carefully explained to us. We can broaden our minds, as we call it, to understand people who are not like us, but still human.

But God, who holds this Universe and all other possible Universes like a bean in the palm of his hand, is beyond our understanding, however much he explains and shows us. The whole spectacular display of his creation is not enough to tell us of him.

But it is still not silent; and the bit which speaks to us most intimately and personally - if we are attuned to it - is our own nature. We must search for God within ourselves.

We have always known that there are truths hidden within us that are more vital for us than any other. This is what makes us human. We have always developed the power to look within, to be aware of ourselves, to meditate on the wonder of our being alive here, and now. It is there, in our innermost consciousness, that we must go to find our real humanity. When we find our real humanity, God will speak to us, and help us to make our great decision. Who are we? Where are we going? To whom do we belong? All of these are the same question, and another way of saying it is to ask, Is there God? What is his intention towards us? How will he speak to us?

To avoid these questions is to duck out of being human, to refuse the agony of human consciousness. Many people give themselves over to be understood as animals, obeying instinct and necessity as animals do, and trying to find meaning in that for 24 hours each day.

It won't work, because we are more than that, and our life becomes like a house half-lived-in: the kitchen and the workshop are all busy full-time, but there is nowhere to rest, or to think, or to relate, and the dining-room and the living-room and the study are closed and shuttered.

We should ask for the Holy Spirit to come to us in Advent, to give us grace to close down our febrile activity, and to open up those deep places where the real meaning of our life lies, and the real treasure. For many in our society, it will be the timid re-entry into the darkened picture-gallery, the discovery of the family portraits, our ancestors and their stories.

For some it will be a painful business of renunciation and conversion, changing the whole course of their life: the journey home of the prodigal son.

For many, it may only begin when they realise they have fallen among thieves, and are plucked helpless from the ditch, and brought to a friendly house by the love of a stranger.

But to all of us God will speak, and summon us again to the banquet of life, and the mysterious and manifold way in which his Word becomes flesh for us.