

God speaks to us in a variety of ways. He speaks to us through the Church. He speaks to our hearts through our conscience. And He speaks to us through the Bible.

The Bible is the word of God. When we read Sacred scripture, God is speaking to us. With our cycle of readings we may hear the same scripture passage several dozen times in our lives. We may tune out because “we’ve heard it all before.” But each time we hear or read a passage from the Gospel, God is trying to tell us something new. Each time we hear it we are in a different place in our lives. We have different priorities and different situations we are dealing with. That is why it is important to listen and pick out the significance of even apparently insignificant details. Sometimes, God is speaking to us in those details.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus sends out the seventy two disciples to share with the world the new life they have discovered with Him. The small detail here is that He does not send them out individually, He sends them out two by two.

When Jesus was questioned by the Pharisee about the greatest commandment, Jesus gave a twofold answer. Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. Before His passion Jesus gave us a new commandment, a new mandate, to love one another as He has loved us.

God is telling us that we are not meant to live in isolation. We flourish only in the company of others. We cannot love in isolation. We cannot become saints in isolation.

And so Jesus sends His disciples out into the world in groups of two. By doing this He sends a clear message, the only true convincing witness to Christianity, comes when we love each other.

We sometimes think of the disciples, those that knew Jesus personally when He was physically present here on earth, as being particularly holy. But they were like all of us. They were human with their own prickly character traits. And Jesus gathered to Him the unlikeliest of people and put them in situations where they had to learn to work with each other.

Look at the inner circle of Jesus, the twelve Apostles. We have Matthew, a former tax collector, and Simon, a former zealot.

Tax collectors were hated by the people. They were seen as collaborators with the occupying Romans. They made their living by over-taxing their own people.

Zealots were looked upon with suspicion. They were freedom fighters who wanted nothing more than to drive out the Romans, even if that meant innocent people were caught up in their uprisings.

Jesus put these two men in His band of twelve. For three years they travelled together, ate together, and shared joys and hardships. The constant teaching they heard from Jesus was to love one another, which they did.

This is the power, the super-power if you will, that we receive as Christians. God will send people into our lives who annoy us, vex us, and drive us crazy. He will give us people we can't stand, people who seem to have one goal in life, to make our lives miserable.

And God commands us to love them.

We don't have to like them. But we do have to pray for them, desire good for them, and show them kindness. And because we all have God's grace, this superpower, within us, we can do this.

I was once asked by a Spiritual Advisor if I prayed for patience. She seemed surprised when I told her no, that is the last thing I would do. When she asked why I explained that I was afraid of what God might send me to teach me patience, like he did with Saint Philip Neri.

Saint Philip Neri is sometimes called the Second Apostle of Rome, after Saint Peter. His personality won him friends from all levels of society at a time of rampant corruption and disinterested clergy.

Some of his followers became priests and together they founded the Oratory, a society of priests and lay-brothers who live together in community. But as you might expect, there were problems.

There were two monks in particular, working as sacristans at the church who for some reason hated Philip and did everything they could to make his life miserable. They knew he was something of a germaphobe and so they always gave him the dirtiest vestments they could find. When he was about to celebrate Mass, they would interrupt his preparations and send him to another altar. They would even lock him out of the sacristy in an attempt to prevent him from celebrating Mass in the first place.

Of course they became the bane of Philip's life. Once during Mass he looked at the crucifix and complained, "Why don't you hear me, Jesus? I've asked you again and again to give me patience. Why is my soul still filled with thoughts of anger and impatience?"

He seemed to hear an answer: "Do you want patience, Philip? I will give it to you, if your heart desires it. You will earn it through these temptations of yours."

And God gave him the power to come to love these two men. In fact, his unrelenting love for them eventually won them over. One day one of the monks started insulting Philip. The other monk began to feel remorse and came to Philip's defense. He ended up punching the tormentor and the two began a raucous fistfight that was only ended when Philip stepped between them. The two monks repented of their actions, begged Philip for forgiveness and returned to their monasteries.

Christ commands us to love others, especially those who torment us. And, like Saint Philip Neri, with God's grace we are able to do just that.

How do we love those who annoy us or attack us?

To start with we need to adjust our outlook when it comes to the troublesome people in our lives.

When someone does something particular annoying, we might try finding the humor in the situation and just laugh it off.

Saint John Paul II said that he would begin each day by asking God for the grace to see each person as a gift. It didn't matter if it was a visiting dignitary or just someone he caught out of the corner of his eye as he crossed St. Peter's Square.

Jesus gives us a very practical way to deal with our enemies.

“Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”

We all have people in our lives who make our lives difficult. Perhaps it is unintentional or perhaps for some reason they dislike us, like the two monks. Regardless of the reason, we may see them as a constant thorn in our side.

It might be someone who speaks poorly of us behind our back. It may be someone who never has a kind word for us but is constantly sarcastic and mean spirited. Maybe it is someone we trusted who has let us down, or maybe it is someone angling for our job.

Whoever it is, the Lord is asking each of us to pray for that person. And by that He doesn't mean to pray that the person meets with some unfortunate accident. He means that we pray God may bless that person, to think kindly of them.

If we do not want to pray for that person then we pray that God give us the grace to want to do so. It may take some effort. We might start with a simple Hail Mary, offered for that other person, even if we offer it through clenched teeth. But do not give up, persevere. By praying for those who persecute us we are imitating Christ who prayed for those who crucified Him.

Our Lord promised us that anything we ask for in His name will be given to us. Let us ask then for the grace to see others as He sees them. Let us pray that we may see every person as a gift from God, someone for whom He died on the cross to save.

Let us pray that we may see with new eyes and love with new hearts, hearts that love as we are loved by Him.