

July 15, 2012  
The Fathers of Chalcedon

### Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The Apostle Paul indicates the dynamic nature of God's Word when he writes, "The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." He doesn't say, "The Word is on the page." Because the process is auditory, how we know God in His Word is radically different from other ways of knowing God. Hearing is at once the most fragile and the most dynamic of human senses.

First, it is fragile; sound is the most transitory and fleeting of physical realities. There is a permanence and solidity to what our eyes behold. It is "out there" apart from us; considered in this way, sight give us the most immediate means of objectivity. What our eyes see tends to "stay put," so we can examine it. We are, in some sense, passive before it.

We certainly perceive motion by the sense of sight but only in by seeing "things" in motion. We "see Spot run." The predicative motion, however, adheres to Spot, and we will continue to see Spot, presumably, even when he stops running.

This is not true of things we hear. The imperative, "See Spot run" exists only for the very brief period my ears perceive it. The sound does not possess the solid reality of Spot.

Sounds consist solely in the motion itself. They disappear right away. We are given only a very brief period to hear them, and then they are gone. If what we hear is not promptly assimilated, we lose it. The Word must be internalized---in your mouth and in your heart"---or else it perishes.

Second, hearing is dynamic; it "generates a sense of life" (Yi-Fu Tuan). Whereas I always stand on the edge of what I see, sound immerses and surrounds me. Sound shares this quality with atmosphere: Like air, I am always "in" it. This is why it can be "in" me. Indeed, sound comes to me, normally, through the medium of air.

Like all sounds, the Word of God is living and dynamic. God reveals Himself through His Word, because human beings internalize sounds more readily than anything else. Indeed, if sounds are expressed in intelligible forms, they lead directly to thought and reflection, in a way not possible to things we see and smell and feel.

In this respect, let us consider that hearing bears the essential mark of sequence, which is missing in vision and the other senses. Sound is available only in the experience of before and after. That is to say, sound addresses human consciousness in its most basic structure, which is an experience within the ongoing flow of time. Among all the sensory experiences of man, acoustics has the greatest affinity to the human awareness of the self, the one enduring thing through the fleeting sequence of consciousness.

Perhaps this is why God chose acoustics---the hearing of His Word---as the normal means of His revelation to the beating human heart, which provides the cadence for the march of time. The Word of God, which in itself endures forever, is in history but an instant of divine grace in the one who attends to it. The Word must be internalized, or else it is lost. "The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart."

This is why the Word must be listened to, each day, with a pure and supple heart. "Today," says the Psalmist, "when you hear His Word, harden not your hearts." Through the medium of the ear, the Word of God is sown in the human heart. It must be sown *today*; it must be living, immediate, and dynamic. The believer does not dare to put off hearing the Word; it must be done *today*.

Everything depends on the response the Word of God receives in the heart. Jesus speaks of this in his interpretation of the parable of the sower: "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a excellent and good heart, keep it, and bear fruit with patience." It is insufficient simply to attend with our ears. The living Word of God must be internalized, as we see in the Prophet Ezekiel, who took the scroll and ate it. In this, he symbolized everyone who truly hears the Word of God. They assimilate the Word and inwardly digest it.

The printed Bible is not, theologically speaking, the Word of God. It becomes the Word of God when it is proclaimed to the hearing. Until then, it is just ink on paper, like the score of a musical work. It becomes the Word of God when we hear it. This is the reason we read Holy Scripture out loud, as earlier believers normally did; "faith comes from hearing." When we open our Bibles, we proclaim the Word to ourselves.

We don't just "read the Bible." We "hear the Word of God." When His Word is proclaimed, even in the privacy of our own homes, God is speaking in the here and now; this the true meaning of expression, "biblical inspiration." It is the Word's active quality, by which God truly speaks to the hearer and comes knocking on his heart.

©2012 Patrick Henry Reardon

**All Saints Orthodox Church**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

**Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor**

[phri@touchstonemag.com](mailto:phri@touchstonemag.com)

**Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:**

[www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html](http://www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html)

**Pastoral Ponderings:**

[http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral\\_ponderings.php](http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php)