

# Heeding God's Voice

BY BR. THOMAS MADDIX, CSC, DMin

One of my favorite quotations is, "What God does first and best is to trust us with our moment in history. God trusts us to do what must be done for the sake of God's whole community."<sup>1</sup> Written by Scripture scholar Walter Brueggemann years ago, this observation captures the reality of the present moment, but it also invites us as individuals and organizations to open ourselves to being touched, shaped, and transformed by God's love and grace. And trusting that God wants to be engaged in our personal and professional lives challenges us to explore who God is and how God reveals God's self to us.

As the current proliferation of books on spirituality attests, people and organizations are awakening to the need to nourish the soul. When I ask people to define the concepts of spirituality or soul, however, they struggle for words that express their inner hunger for meaning, belonging, connectedness, integrity, and integration.

## LESSONS IN THE BASIC QUESTION

Those of us raised in Catholic and other Christian traditions heard a basic question in our early religious formation: "Why did God make us?" We were taught a response: "To know, love, and serve God in this world and be happy with God in the next." This enduring question and its response probably capture the nature of spirituality better than any other explanation. They get to the core of why we are here as individuals and organizations.

The response to the question shows us our role in creation. We learn that we are part of a larger story. As we journey through life, we come to know, love, and serve God in concert with others, and we discover that our journey has an end point. As we travel, however, we often get detoured and lose sight of where we are going and how to get there. Meister Eckhart expressed it well: "God is at home; it's we who have gone out on a walk."<sup>2</sup>

Eckhart's remark speaks to us today, for many Christians working within Christian organizations have "gone out on a walk" and gotten lost. We



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introduction to  
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may have forgotten why we exist; what it means, in a practical sense, to participate in Jesus' healing ministry; and how to listen for and heed God's voice as it reveals itself in the noise and busyness of daily events.

## WAYS TO BE OPEN TO SPIRITUALITY

Graham Greene identified three ways for us to be open to spirituality.<sup>3</sup> He said we need moments of solitude, the ability to suffer with another, and the ability to pay attention to the restlessness of our soul.

When was the last time, as individuals or a leadership group, we invited solitude and prayer into our lives for more than a few brief seconds? Without solitude, how can we discern what comes from God and what comes from our egos or from our unreflective culture?

If we are unwilling to suffer with another, how can we be attentive to our own wounds and need for healing and transformation? How can we hear the myriad voices of those with whom we work and those we serve?

If we are too busy to pay attention to our own inner restlessness, how can we respond to the uneasiness of the organization and the energy of the Spirit seeking to stretch our imagination and open new pathways of creativity? The images of Jesus in the desert and of Jacob wrestling with the angel and being changed apply here, for it is through the wrestling that we come to know ourselves, others, God, and all creation. Through struggling with our unresolved questions and unclear needs, we become instruments of God's grace in our daily lives.

## SPIRITUALITY'S MANY SIDES

Christian spirituality is about times of great joy and awe, as well as moments of sadness, sorrow, and suffering. At times we are like Peter, who denies that he knows Jesus for fear of his life; at other times our hearts burn with recognition as we see Jesus not only in the Eucharist but in the events of

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**GOD'S VOICE**

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**"O**ur task is to let the divine emerge from our deeds."

each day. As Christians, our lives are challenged, nurtured, and affirmed by the story of Jesus—the crowds and loneliness of Gethsemane, the moments of awe, the times of agony.

Although as individuals and organizations we are hungry for meaning, we often do not truly believe that God trusts us to be bearers of God's message. Many of us play a tape in our head: "God works through those people, not me." We need to break that tape if we are to experience a deep relationship with God. In addition, few of us know how to articulate our insights about how God's self is revealed to us inwardly and outwardly. We feel insecure and foolish when we try to speak about the soul, whether it be on a personal level or regarding the organization.

**SELF-QUESTIONS**


Looking at God's invitation, so clearly articulated by Brueggemann, I invite you to reflect on questions about spirituality's place in your life as you seek to become more comfortable with voicing your perceptions of spirituality:

- Where do you find satisfaction and joy in your work?
- How do you nurture your soul and the soul of the organization in which you work?
- What does not nurture your soul?
- What is sacred about your work, and what makes it sacred for others?
- In what ways do you recognize God's presence in your work, in your relationships, and in the depths of your soul?

**SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES FOR HEALTHCARE LEADERS**

The great Jewish writer Abraham Joshua Heschel captures the challenge of making tangible the healing mission of Jesus in our individual and corporate lives: "God is hiding in the world and our task is to let the divine emerge from our deeds."<sup>4</sup>

As healthcare providers, our essential challenge is to awaken the power of the Spirit to lead us forward into an uncharted future. To do that, we must walk with kindred spirits who seek solitude and prayer, are willing to suffer with another, and pay attention to the restless Spirit within themselves and others. □

 For more information on CHA's Center for Leadership Excellence or its spirituality resource, *On Holy Ground*, contact the center's director, Carol Tilley, at CHA (314-427-2500).

**NOTES**

1. Walter Brueggemann, "The Trusted Creature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 31, 1969, p. 488.
2. Meister Eckhart quoted in Matthew Fox, *Wrestling with the Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life*, Harper-Collins, New York City, 1995, p. 221.
3. Discussions of Graham Greene in Alan Jones, *Exploring Spiritual Direction: An Essay on Christian Friendship*, Winston Press, Minneapolis, 1982, pp. 23-27.
4. Lucinda Vardey, ed., *God in All Worlds: An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing*, Alfred A. Knopf Canada, Toronto, 1995, p. 419.