

# Having trouble tuning into God?

**WE talk about 'listening to God' in our prayer time – but what does that mean?**

We may find space to give God some time and attention. We may try to still our bodies, and settle the whirling of our minds by paying attention to our breathing, or just repeating a prayer-word, perhaps in time with our breathing. Then we may ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to 'listen'. But what do we actually listen to?

A famous Celtic Christian used to say that God's word was written in "God's big book, and God's little book".

The 'big book' is God's creation – the world all around us, the people in it, what's going on. As the Bible says: "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

This can be an opportunity to be attentive to God – to slow down and take careful, appreciative note of creation around us, to

## the big issue



**We spend much of our prayer times talking God. But how can we listen out for his still, small voice? Diocesan spirituality adviser the Rev Peter Lippiett gives us some valuable tips**

see what God might be saying to us through that. Does creation tell us something about the glory of God, or about his eye for fine detail, for instance?

But, more specifically, the 'little book' is the scriptures. If we believe that they contain God's word, that they are inspired by God's Spirit, then we may believe that God will, above all, speak to us through them.

Benedict, that great sixth century Christian, taught his monks to use scripture in prayer. He called it 'sacred reading' - taking a short passage to "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest".

I think of that as the four Rs of

prayer: *reading, repeating* a word or phrase that stands out for you, *responding* in your heart to God about what that phrase has given you, and then *resting* before God with that phrase on your heart. How might that phrase or thought affect what you do in the rest of the day?

A thousand years after Benedict, the converted soldier Ignatius of Loyola encouraged his followers to use the scriptures in prayer.

Taking a gospel story, you can use your God-given imagination to think yourself into the story – to feel the setting, see the people, hear the words. Where are you,

who are you, in this story? If Jesus is speaking, what do his words say to you, now?

And Ignatius encouraged them to spend time at the end of every day reviewing it: asking God to show what has been positive; what to give thanks for; what may have been negative, and why; and what to take forward to tomorrow. Another way of listening to God.

It may not be easy on our own to hear the way in which God speaks to us. Christians across the ages have used other Christians as companions on their spiritual journey – a relationship of total confidence, where anything can be discussed, but always with the underlying questions: "Where is God in all this? What is God saying to me?"

Celtic Christians called such companions 'soul friends'; the Western Church has tended to call them 'spiritual directors'.

Over the past four years we've been introducing people in our diocese to some of the traditions of Christian spirituality and

prayer such as those of Benedict and Ignatius – and many others. Around 50 people have gained experience accompanying others in their journey of listening for God. They are available to help you, if you'd like this sort of help.

And if you'd like to explore more about prayer and the spiritual traditions, are open to thinking wider than you might have been used to, or find that people talk to you about meaning, purpose and God, then maybe our next year-long Spirituality Course (October 2007 to July 2008) could be for you? Applications need to reach me by May 21 for interviews in June. Perhaps we might then together be finding out more about listening to God?

● For more information about spiritual direction, please contact Peter Lippiett on 023 9282 6120 or [peter.lippiett@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:peter.lippiett@portsmouth.anglican.org); application forms for the spirituality course are available from Kay Lancaster (023 9289 9656 or [kay.lancaster@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:kay.lancaster@portsmouth.anglican.org)) and need to be returned by May 21.

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