

MY LISTENING TO GOD

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – 22 AUGUST 2021



Please Note: The homily has been transcribed from the audio recording of the livestream Mass.

I'm not sure how this homily will go today.

I prepared a homily for last night and then this morning there was no homily, because we had the Catechumenate – we had two adults becoming members of the Church and the baptism down there and the reception (into the Church).

But during the night I kept getting prompted by the Spirit and so, I am not sure how to go through this – it might be a bit longer than you intend.

One of the ideas, in sharing the other night – to those who became Catholic today - is about how the Spirit prompts. And last night after Mass, I had a few questions from people about what am I going to do in September and October – why the study? And they couldn't understand it. So, this is a response and I'll see how I go.

I'd like to invite us all, to think what's clear in our lives from God and what do we still need to listen to God about, to continue to discern.

EARLY YEARS

It was in my sub-senior and senior years that I received the promptings from God, and I was still trying to understand it – to go to the seminary, to study to become a priest - and I followed that prompting and later on went into the seminary, and that was in 1973.

The prompting was still there but nothing certain. 1973, 1974 until in my third year of the six and a half years in the seminary in 1975, it was in prayer, that I got this definite calling. And after that, I have held to that.

But of course, when God calls us, God doesn't give us a blueprint of everything exactly, what we've got to do. He gives the direction. So that was in 1975 and continued on 1976 and 1977. Later in 1977 I kept feeling inadequate – I just thought there were some other studies that were not offered by the seminary at that time, that I needed to help me as a priest later on.

So, I made decision to leave the seminary. I told people that I'd be leaving but I would be coming back - it was just this other study that I needed. And then I went and did a silent retreat and God

reversed it on me. And I got the message back - *trust in God, the study comes later*, when I don't know.

GOD CALLS

Okay, so it was a very definite calling from God to continue. So then I had to go and tell everyone that I said I was leaving, that I know I am staying. That was a nice exercise in humility again. And then coming through diaconate and ordination and then to the first two parishes. While I was in the second of the two parishes - it was in Gympie in 1983, in March, that I received a very definite calling – to somehow, no blueprint, to work, to some aspect, in ministry to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I asked the archbishop, who also was prompted in the Spirit, about it, to delay that to the beginning of 1984, because there was some commitments I'd already made in the parish of Gympie at that time.

So, that continued to then into 1984, 1985 and through the years.

In 1989, finally that study that I'd been worrying about in the seminary, became possible and I was sent to Thailand to do an international course on faith and justice. I had six months, of which five months was on that course. And, through that, before I came home, there was this prompting by God...*I'll lead you somewhere, you'll find out later* - trust in God, you know the feeling. I don't know whatever that course was going to call me into, but I came back to Brisbane to work and ended up being transferred to the parish of Christ the King at Graceville, which still kept the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connection.

In 1993 I was getting this prompting again from God - and just thinking again of the first reading, where God, through Joshua, asks people to make a commitment, he queries them and in the Gospel today, Jesus put it on the apostles, what is their belief?

So, at the end 1993 I started talking to the parish council at Graceville and through the early months, I was involved at that time, as well as the parish, with [Queensland Churches Together](#) in an [Aboriginal Partnership Group](#) it was called, working ecumenically in Queensland for reconciliation. It came out of the Mabo decision, and it came out of the Queensland Churches responding to the Native Title legislation, which looked doubtful at that time, that it would even get through.

And so there was a lot of lobbying at that time and this prompting. Finally I found the direction that I had a calling to go to South Africa. When I checked out the insurance, you couldn't be insured for it and so that was a stressful time.

So we were called and this calling ...it was Father Peter Dorfield in Toowoomba had been before. And the Christian churches of the world guaranteed, from 1992 there would be Christian peace monitors, on the ground, in South Africa, leading up to the first free election, because in 1992 the election didn't look as though it was going to go ahead.

So there were people from around the Christian churches in Australia and overseas that went, and they became [International Church Monitors for Peace](#).

I remember our team leader in South Africa, Patrick, he was part of our little team and he'd been caught previously in crossfire between two groups and had survived. So they said, if you're in his team, you see action, which was not what we were looking for.

We continued and continued to see God's miracles, continue to unfold.

Uprisings promised, people armed and then arming would stop, bombings were happening and then they would stop...everything sort of going on. And in that process, our particular group, because we were there for the leading up to the election – then we became [Election Observers](#).

And by South African legislation we carried this (ID card) with us, and it said, *"All persons are required to give every assistance to the bearer in the execution of his or her duties"* for that election process - and we went everywhere.

And just one sharing on that - and I am wondering why I'm there - and one of the things we had to do, was get into one of the prisons, where the people there were allowed to vote in the first election. And the teams before us had been restricted and told they couldn't go by the prison commandant.

So we were down checking on a community in Orange Free State and came back that day to Transvaal, where we were based. And going to the prison and we applied and were knocked back entry, to go in and see what the process could be available and to talk to the prisoners about the right to vote and the commandant said, *"no"*.

But listening to the radio, driving back from Orange Free State, I caught the news that Queensland, at Ballymore in rugby union, had beaten Transvaal. So you talk to people where they're at, that's what we do in life. So I asked to see the prison commandant as a rugby union supporter from Brisbane, who used to go to Ballymore to see the union games, and he granted me an interview. And I said what we were trying to do, but I reminded him, just in the game, that Queensland had just beaten Transvaal. He went all red in the face and the other prison officer next to him took three steps back... and I thought, I'm in trouble now! And then he thought, and he said, *"only today will I grant you access - only because your team beat mine."* We're talking about elections, freedom of people, independence, whatever... and the only reason we're allowed in is because his team had lost to Queensland. You never know how these things happen.

The parish had set up, while I was away, 24 x 7 prayer, right around the clock, all night, all day all afternoon. There was a roster of people set up, so wherever we went there were people praying. And when I came back, the parish council said, *"we've been praying but we've felt, in our own prayer, that God is calling us to follow up on this now."*

So, back in back in Brisbane, at Graceville, we were discerning, and an opportunity came to twin with a parish in East Timor – this was still during the really tough times of East Timor. They were not independent, an enormous number of people that died from Indonesia military and Indonesian sponsored militia, malnutrition, there had been at least three attempts on the bishop's life, where they tried to kill him. So praying about it and we said, we'll go over there and have a look. There were two other people going from another place and we would travel together, and then the other two pulled out for safety reasons and that left me. So again we



ID card

had to talk about it and pray about it in the parish. Was this just what we're thinking or was God calling. So we spent time as a community praying about it and then finally, we went to East Timor in September, that same year as the South African elections.

I was discovering more and more that I need to listen to God continually, the need to trust in God always, and the third thing is, it's never about ourselves, it's about the human family in solidarity – praying to find where we fit as a small part of that jigsaw

I came back then went to another time...another couple of times.

Then in 1977 was sent on my second study leave and I won't go into all that, but it fed into East Timor in an unexpected way. And it was through that second study leave that in 1997 that helped me and others in 1999. I was over there twice in East Timor in 1999 – first, to visit the parish of Liquiçá (Tetum: Likisá), where at least 17 people had been killed in the parish previously. And then later trying to find lost people after INTERFET (International Force East Timor) had gone in, after the election.

Every time I've been on study leave, I have never known the outcome. Now I start study leave on the first of September. So I don't go in, and I can't say exactly to people, what I'm doing, because what I'm trying to do, is listen to where God is calling. I'll begin the study leave with John of the Cross and Edith Stein and with Karl Rahner looking at the issue and the mysticism and prayer in our lives and where it leads us. Father Gary Walker will be the relief priest while I'm gone.

All through that, one of the symbols of working in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community was this stole. This stole was made for my ordination – one of the stoles – by the Carmelite Sisters for 1979. When I went to work in the Murri community, Arden O'Chin, who has since died, painted in the Aboriginal design within it. And so it's always been a connection between my priesthood, with that Carmelite Spirituality of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, which has been part of my prayer life, all my life, without trying to understand it all, the Murri community and wherever God leads. Those two young women today became Catholic on a journey where they were listening continually to where God is leading them.



The stole - made by the Carmelites & an Aboriginal painting was later added by Arden O'Chin

It was in 2009, in prayer and sharing with others, and getting them to pray that I ended up visiting Iraq for the first time. That came out of prayer. Three times in my life I've been invited to work overseas as a missionary or to do a particular job. In Ghana, in Papua New Guinea and teaching at a seminary, teaching scripture in Iraq. In none of those three times did I find God calling me to that. God was calling me elsewhere. So because we're invited to do things, does not mean necessarily that is where God is calling us.

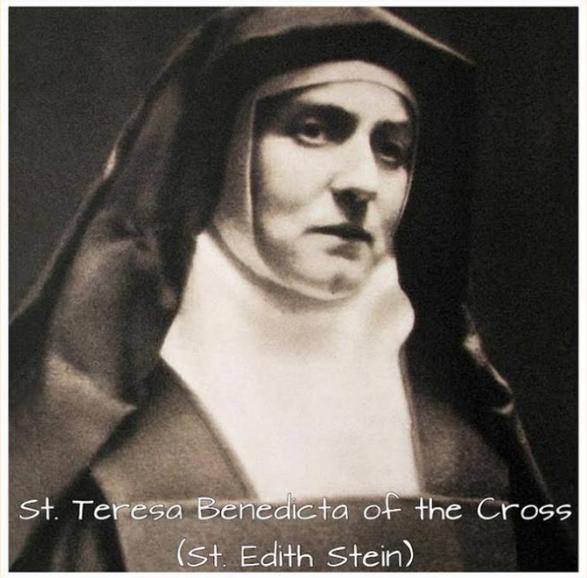
We continue to journey together and when I come back, I'd like to change our Masses, at least twice a month. I'd like people to have the opportunity to come up here and to reflect on their journey with God, where God has called you, where God is calling you and how God calls you into the unknown.

Father Gerry Hefferan

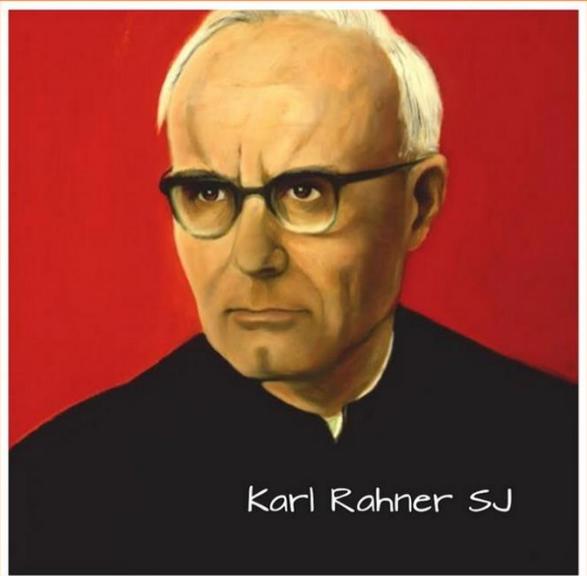
[YouTube video <https://bit.ly/VideoMass22082021> Readings <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/082221.cfm>]



St. John of the Cross



St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
(St. Edith Stein)



Karl Rahner SJ