

In our first reading Peter recounts the watershed moment of God's will to include the Gentiles into His covenant family. The Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit just as the Jewish people did back in Acts 2.

While the daily Mass readings rarely line up, today there is a common theme between them. Peter is at prayer and sees a vision. Additionally, he says, "I heard a voice," a voice he hears not once, but twice. A little later, Peter says, "The Spirit told me..."

In our gospel, Jesus speaks about sheep that can distinguish the voice of the gatekeeper or the shepherd from the voice of a stranger. He says the sheep recognize His voice.

In both readings, then, we have this theme of God's voice speaking. For Peter, it comes in prayer. In the Gospel, the sheep have become so accustomed to the shepherd, that they instinctively recognize the voice.

Every so often in meeting with people, someone will ask, "Father, how do I recognize God's voice. I mean, how do I know if it is God's voice or just my own?" This is a great question.

First, I clarify how God can speak to us. Sometimes He wills speak via a voice. Sometimes it will be an image. For Peter, it was both. God can also speak through a "sense" on our hearts, which is deeper than words. God can speak to us in our memories or even our feelings.

How do we know if it from God, our own voice, or a voice of temptation? There are a couple of criteria to look at. First, we ask if it is consistent with the Church's teaching, Sacred Scripture, or even Jesus Himself. What God reveals to us in prayer (private revelation) must be consistent with public revelation.

Second, assuming it is moral and in line with the Church, we can look at the fruits. For example, in following what we believe is God's voice, does it increase our desire for doing God's will? Does it lead to an increase in virtue – faith, hope, and charity?

Does it give us a deeper sense of peace or rest in the Lord? Does it give us a sense of joy? If our thoughts, image, feeling, or desire received in prayer are consistent with the Church, and lead us to the Lord and increase virtue, our sense of peace, rest, and joy, we can be confident that they are from the Lord and not ourselves or a spirit of temptation.