

“Listening beneath the surface.”

Ash Wednesday, 2022

*“But whenever you pray, go into your inner room...
and speak with the One who sees what is hidden.”
(Cf. Matthew 6:6)*

“The expression, “deep listening” is making a really important point, that is: often our listening is at the surface of things...if you find that you already know what someone (or even God) is going to say before you listen, then you're probably listening on the surface of things.” (Cf. [Deep Listening](#) by Dale Ryan)

But when you experience something that wakes you up, makes you stop, pay attention and ask: “what's going on; what's happening?” That's when deep listening can begin.

Deep listening is all about taking a look “inside”. When we apply it to ourselves, it's about paying attention to our “gut feelings.” It's about listening to our inner voice, when it says “Enough, I can't handle this.” For many people, this kind of listening only becomes possible when they run out of energy to do anything else.

When we stop running, that's when most insights find us.

That's when we come to understand that we've been tearing apart our lives like someone tearing apart the cushions of a couch looking for a set of lost keys. And after we've turned everything upside-down; after we've convinced ourselves that we've checked every possible place we could think of, that's when panic sets in: we don't have a clue about where to look next. (Cf. [The gentle gift of mercy](#) by Anne Lamott)

It's a deeply unsettling feeling. But it's also one we can all relate to. And that's significant.

The symbolism of Ash Wednesday suggests that we stop covering up the unsettling experiences we all share in common. On this day it's okay to ask one another publicly: "Why is it that we think we're broken (beyond repair) just because we've encountered something we can't resolve on our own?"

This is what it really comes down to. "I can't do this called life on my own."

That's the major plot point of every human story. The brokenness we encounter in our lives is an unmistakable sign we are not meant to resolve everything on our own. To think otherwise is to believe a terrible lie: to believe that we are better off alone.

We need each other, in a way that is sometimes scary, but in reality we're just making sure everyone gets home safely. Like the Good samaritan, we're just walking one another home. (Cf. Parable of the Good Samaritan, [Luke 10:25-37](#))

We need supportive presences in our lives so that we can be loyal to the questions opened up in us without being overwhelmed. We need people, like us, who (bearing the mark of ashes) are ready to admit, we've been tearing up our couches too; we've been exhausting ourselves with panicky activity and we've been searching everywhere and coming up empty.

Ordinarily we begin Lent by tracing a cross made of ashes on our foreheads. A sign of our common and most painful experiences. Once again this year, instead of an outer mark of ashes, let our hearts bear the mark of ashes inwardly.

So I now invite you to trace a small cross over your heart. Let it mark your choice to stop and listen

Let us pray, Lord

Over the next forty days help us to listen beneath the surface of things.

Lord this change of outlook is the essence of the conversion we're looking for. One that changes the way we look at everything and allows us to see things from another perspective; one that is as honest as it is gentle. Give us a share in the surprising perspective you open up for us.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, we place our trust in you.