

JANUARY 17, 2026 FATHER JOHN BERTAO

I think that many of us, you and I included in that, have experienced times in our life when we are in a desperate need of something.

It might be perhaps when a good friend or family member is sick, and we want them to get better because we rely on their friendship or their help for whatever it might be. Maybe we ask for a sign that God is listening to our prayers, and well, maybe you feel that God is not listening. He's got other things to do. Bigger things to look after.

As I mentioned, I, too, have experienced those times that it seems that God was just not listening. This is when I am reminded that God does listen all the time, more than I do. In many occasions, God talks to us through others, and of course, God always speaks to us through sacred Scripture, through the Bible.

The question is, though, that I ask you and I always ask myself: are we listening to God talking to us in different ways that we don't always understand? And sometimes, I pray so much that, well, I'm just not listening to God. So, I just have to be quiet and be still and listen.

St. Anthony of Egypt, who we celebrate today, was in such a situation.

You see, very, very briefly, he was born in a small village in Egypt in the year 251. He was 20 years old when his parents died. They left him a large estate and placed him in charge of care of his younger sister. Anthony felt overwhelmed, and turned to God in prayer. Gradually, he became more and more aware of the power of God in his life.

About six months later, Anthony heard this quotation of Jesus in the Gospel that stated, and I quote, "Go sell what you own and give the

money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." That's St. Mark's Gospel. So, he took the words as a personal message in answer to his prayer for personal guidance. Anthony sold his possessions, keeping only enough support to support his sister and himself. Then, he gave the rest of the money to the people who needed it.

From my reading on his life, St. Anthony wanted to be closer to God and have no distractions from other people. As a result, he became a disciple of a local hermit. Yet he wanted more, so he went further into the desert for many years. Eventually, he emerged and founded monasteries for other hermits who also wanted to be closer to God.

Because of his holiness and focusing on God, his wisdom was so profound, everywhere, people went to see him, to sought him, because he was gifted with wonderful wisdom from above. He was often tempted, as many times, we are, too. He was often tempted by demons and prayed for the courage to overcome them by their convincing ways of life, to recognize them and overcome them by intense prayer.

Anthony continued his quest for solitude. Yet, he saw relationships with others as the key to the spiritual life. He concluded saying that if we gain our brother, we gain Christ, but if we scandalize our neighbour, we sin against Christ.

In short, then, history tells us that Anthony died at the age of 105 and was buried secretly on top of his mountain. St. Anthony loved God so much that he wanted others to love God as well, as much as he did.

And in today's Gospel, Jesus states that his mission in obvious ways that all could understand.

He stated, "I came not to call the righteous, but to call sinners also." And according to Romans 3, "All have sinned and can fall short of God's

glory." Of God, the glory that he has for us. So, the Lord fills us with his grace and mercy, but we must be patient. We must be focused on him, and many, many times, in silent listening to God, who wants to speak to us.

See, God wants us to turn to him and seek him for the good of others, for it to be—to help others, including the neglected, the troublemaker and others, by showing them the same kindness and mercy which we have received. It's not just about me. It's also about us, others who we're in communion with.

In short, then, do you thank God for the great kindness and mercy that he has shown you? To pause. To think. To thank. Because we tend to ask, but how many times do we thank? Jesus loves to hear a thank-you from us as well, perhaps on a regular basis.

How about the other phrase that I say so many times during the day, and I've shared with you as well, to say many times during the day: Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I thank you.

Let me ride out with a prayer.

Lord Jesus, our Saviour, let us now come to you. Our hearts are cold. Lord, warm them with your selfless love. Our hearts are sinful. Cleanse them with your precious blood. Our hearts are weak. Strengthen them with your joyous spirit. Our hearts are empty. Fill them with your presence. Lord Jesus, our hearts are yours. Possess them always and only for yourself.

Amen.