

Amidst all the grim news about the war, I welcome the coverage about religion. People prayed in churches and spoke to the media openly about their faith. Driving through town this week I noticed a sign that said, "Pray for World Peace." It hung on a local Burger King where they usually post the price of a whopper. It's fitting. Prayer is the price for a whopper of a war.

In crisis, people turn to God. We all do it. We pray when tragedy hits us--whether it's war, sickness, death, or not having a date on Friday night.

We all do it, but why? Why do we pray when things go wrong, especially since we rarely get God to change things around?

Today's readings give us two wonderful stories about turning to God. One about a boy asleep in church, the other about the first followers of Jesus.

In the Gospel, Jesus first appears in public. John the Baptist nudges his disciples to check him out. Now, their whole conversation with Jesus takes about ten words, but it bursts with anticipation. Jesus asks, "What do you want?" They ask, "Where do you live?" And he says, "Come and see." They do. They turn to God.

The first reading is about a kid asleep in the temple. He hears a voice calling his name, Samuel. He doesn't know about God--he hasn't gone to school of religion. So he approaches Eli the priest and asks, "What do you want?" You notice how times have changed. People rarely confuse the voice of God with the voice of a priest. But recently a toddler here at St. Regis pointed me out to her grandmother and said, "That's Jesus." I was flattered until the grandmother told me the little girl was surprised because she was expecting someone taller.

Anyway, Samuel asks the priest, "What do you want?" And he keeps telling the boy to be quiet and go back to bed. This has not changed: Sometimes priests are pretty dense. But Eli finally figures out that it's God, and tells Samuel, "When you hear that voice, say these words: 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'" And Samuel turns to God.

Why do people pray, especially in time of crisis? In both stories today, people turn to God not on their own, but as a response. God calls Samuel by name; Jesus asks the disciples what they want. Then they turn.

In time of need we turn to God. It's as natural as picking up the phone. But it's not to dial a number; it's because the phone is ringing. If we turn to God, God has already turned to us; he's already begun the conversation.

If we're down because God doesn't do what we want, we may be looking too much at what comes after our prayer and not enough at what comes before. Before we pray, God speaks to us. Friendship with God offers the peace we seek.