



February 11, 2018 – Listen

Given by Rev. Mattei

“This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (Mark 9:7)

Many have commented of the breath of fresh air that the 2nd Vatican Council has been not only for the church of Rome but for the universal Church. The theological and spiritual reflections coming out of that intense period (early 1960s) were truly a testimony to the Spirit of Jesus moving freely through the Church. Yet, many did not appreciate the open mindedness and sense of freedom that bishops and theologians, ordained and lay people expressed in the many new documents meant to regulate Church life and outreach. Many Roman Catholics bemoaned the outcome of the Council as a suggestion to a spiritually spurious and unrestrained life: church leadership seemed to have relinquished all authority and desire to guide. In my view, the Roman church had moved decidedly towards trusting the movement of the Spirit and relinquished control over people’s lives. The church was treating people as adults capable of listening and responding to the promptings of the Spirit without the interference and control of the Vatican. In other words, the church was treating people as adults capable of interpreting and leading their own spiritual life. To some, that was too much freedom; many did not enjoy making that spiritual effort and preferred to be told what to do, what to think and what to believe.

As a teenager I searched the will of God and the words of Scripture for guidance in my life. There had been many a moment when I anguished over life choices praying for clear guidance from God; many a times I had hoped for God to speak clear and loud commands for me to follow. Why wasn’t God speaking to me as to the people of the Bible? Wasn’t the Bible supposed to give life instructions? How was I supposed to lead a Godly life if I didn’t hear from God? Undoubtedly, I was in that stage of spiritual life where I assumed there were blueprints in heaven which I needed to follow. I felt anxious about not responding to the will of God and therefore upsetting God. My spirituality as a teenager was about fulfilling duties and appeasing a demanding God. Fear of God was fear of punishment.

Only with the self-revelation of a loving and forgiving God have I experienced grace and spiritual maturity. The words of God in the gospel of Mark at the time of Jesus' baptism and then at the transfiguration: "This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him." have accompanied me throughout my life journey. That meant building a house on rocky ground¹ and being a doer of his word.²

Yet, his word is like a double-edged sword "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."³ God's Word is not a prescription to go to heaven. God speaks to us a Word of Love that creates, renews and purifies us so that we may know God and ourselves more profoundly. It's about how we want to live our life on earth. What God wants is to attract us into a covenantal love where we acknowledge God as our only Lord and not follow the other gods that populate the world's pantheon such as power, prestige, and possessions. God requires our full attention in order to communicate to us the fullness of life; we can achieve concentrated attention through prayer.

Yet, we need to ask: Are we listening? Igor Stravinsky said, "To listen is an effort, and just to hear is no merit. A duck hears also." If this is true of music, how much more does it bear on God's command? It is one thing to admire the Messiah; to obey him is something else. Listening to him is our daily discipleship practice. Getting to know Jesus, paying attention to what he says, connecting with his Spirit and following him closely starts with prayer.

Jesus himself models a life of prayer. He calls us as he called his disciples, Peter, James and John, to follow him on Mount Tabor and spend some time apart, by ourselves. Only by leaving the cares and concerns of the world behind for some time during the day and by accepting to be "apart" by ourselves with Jesus can we witness the mystery of the Transfiguration. We are led into solitude to pray. If we persevere in prayer the enlightening will come, and "enveloped in the glory of the Divine [...] we will come to know that the essence of prayer, of all Christian life, is that total response to receptive listening."⁴

At the top of the mountain Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, appear: the revelation of the mystery of who Jesus is comes to us through the Sacred Scriptures. We may approach and know God through nature just as our father Abraham did and even as our Eastern brothers and sisters do through spiritual and ascetical revelation. What we have with Jesus is an historical revelation: the incarnation of

¹ Luke 6:46-49; Matthew 7:24-27

² James 1:22-25; Luke 8:21

³ Hebrews 4:12

⁴ Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer*, p. 138

Emmanuel, God-with-us. And if God is incarnated, if we are made in the image of God, if the Spirit of Jesus is given to us, then the Light of Jesus revealed at the time of the Transfiguration is also our Light to reveal: we are Light of the world just as Jesus is Light of the world.⁵

But this Light cannot be revealed to us before we go through the Paschal mystery, before we experience death to the world and resurrected life in Jesus, our Baptismal pattern. "On Tabor we are given a glimpse of the reality that Easter speaks of: the glory of the Risen Christ, the consummation of human dignity and exaltation."⁶ We, after all, follow after him, the firstborn of all believers.⁷

Therefore, let us heed the words of God from the cloud: in listening to him we display trust and belonging, a sure mark of discipleship. Let us spend time in prayer, alone with him, savoring silence even when we are restless and tempted to speak (to make noise) out of fear and anxiety. Let us start with the Holy Scriptures that reveal to us the Christ and let us enter into the mystery of the Light, the majesty of the image of God in us whom we are called to manifest. And let us then descend into our everyday life comforted by that vision and strengthened by that knowledge, inspiring others to come closer to the Light.

Prayer is foundational to a disciple's life: let us not neglect our daily encounter with our Lord.

⁵ Matthew 5:14 and John 8:12

⁶ Basil Pennington, p. 137

⁷ Romans 8:29