

23rd Sunday (B)

- The ability to hear & to speak are two great gifts.
- Like all gifts they can be taken for granted, or even misused & only when we lose them, do we realise how precious they've been.
- We see this especially in the case of the elderly - when their hearing goes they retreat into silence.
- Like the story I read about an elderly man who had serious hearing problems for a number of years. He went to the doctor & the doctor was able to have him fitted for a set of hearing aids that allowed him to hear almost perfectly. It was one of those new ones that fitted into the ear canal & was virtually invisible. He went back in a month to the doctor for a check up on his progress & the doctor, upon examining him said, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again." The gentleman replied, "Oh, I haven't told my family yet.... I just sit around & listen to the conversations.... I've changed my will three times!"
- But even for us whose hearing wouldn't be diagnosed medically as impaired, we hear at different levels & there are some people who though they hear, are not very good at listening - I'm sure **you** have experienced talking to someone who was not really interested in what you had to say.
- And how often have you caught yourself not listening to someone else?
- Words, of course, are not merely words, they, carry within them meaning.
- They are often precious bearers of meaning.
- So why is it that people tune each other out?
- Why is it that people hear but don't listen, don't hear with understanding?
- Are our minds too cluttered with information that really doesn't matter?
- Are we too busy hearing ourselves talk & are so absorbed with our own feelings & what we have to say that we have no room for the thoughts & feelings of others?
- Jesus well understood the importance of not only hearing but of listening. "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear,"
- He did His best to get our attention, hoping that we would hear & take into our hearts what He had to say.
- He had come from His Father to us bringing God's love & God's Word for us. Jesus Christ was God's very expression of Himself to us.
- In our day we have amazing means of communicating that we could never have imagined a generation ago.
- And more & more communications are done through images.
- Movies, TV, the Internet & mobile phones communicate through images & pictures, visual media that are overtaking words.
- Could you imagine even 2 years ago, that much of our visual communication would be done through Zoom & Google meets & YouTube.
- There's a certain danger in what's happening to us, the danger that superficiality may dominate substance, so it is that we need to take time to reflect & not overload our minds with just words & images alone.
- They do us no real good unless & until we ponder, reflect, & take their meanings into our hearts & minds.
- We also need to go into our inner selves & "listen" to what we find there.
- There is a beautiful O.T. passage that takes us there, it's from the First Book of Kings:

- *"The Lord said to Elijah, the prophet, 'Go out & stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great & powerful wind tore the mountains apart & shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper of a breeze. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face & went out & stood at the mouth of the cave to listen."*
- It is beautiful how God speaks to us in a still, quiet voice, but if the noise of the world is drowning out our ability to listen to Him, if we are awash in words & overloaded with information, we can miss out on what God is trying to tell us.
- It would do us good to take some time out each day to remove ourselves from distractions such as television, friends, text messages, twittering, or whatever may be keeping us from hearing God's gentle whisper & take time to reflect.
- The big problem we have in our lives is the problem of time - time & the relative importance we give to things; And when we consider what's in front of us, we could ask ourselves: What could be more important than letting God touch me, reveal himself to me & speak to me of His love for me?
- The ceremony of touching the ears & the tongue made its way into the Baptismal rite from early times - what is called the 'Ephphatha prayer' & is still there to this day.
- The Church has been mandated to express this healing of hearing.
- I touch the ears & mouth of the person being baptised & say, *'The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear & the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, & your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise & glory of God the Father.'*
- We need to be able to hear the word of God that is spoken to me in all the people & events in my ordinary daily life - for that I need to be able to hear & listen in the depths of my heart; then we need to be able to profess that word with our lips.
- Finally, we need to put it into practice in our lives.
- In this time of the COVID Pandemic are we listening to what God is saying to us, because God is revealing himself & speaking to us – are we perceptive?
- From long experience the Church learned that by listening to the signs of the times Christians could better proclaim Christ to each new generation.
- In our own time, as Pope Francis puts it, the Church needs 'to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor'.
- Environmental and human degradation are everywhere, crying out for remedy.
- In this Season of Creation we might ask ourselves whether we are good listeners.
- Do we listen to the warnings of scientists about climatic change, to the stories of climate refugees, or do we block our ears in closed-minded self-interest and ignore Jesus' command, *'Ephphatha'* – be open.
- The irony is that even though the Church has been mandated to minister this healing of hearing, it can be deaf to the voice of the Spirit expressed through people.
- In the wider Church the Pope is directing us to synodality, & in the Church of Australia with the Plenary Council there is the demand to listen & hear widely in order to discern how we are to be Church today.
- So in this Eucharist we pray: Lord, unblock our ears; help us to hear what you have to say to us; Loosen our tongues so that we may bring your Good News to all we meet; & help us to see your hand at work in the world & in our lives.