

Homily: 2nd Sunday of Lent – Mark 9: 2-10 - Year B - 02/25/2024

"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!" This week, in the passage of the Transfiguration of the Lord, I want to focus on one rarely underlined aspect that is imperative to our advancing in the Lenten journey: listening to God the Father speaking.

The Son invited the disciples to follow him. In this following, he constantly pointed them to the Father. He called them, and they followed him, the man who had come from God. But now the Father himself says to them – the three who have been chosen – "Listen to him." The Father himself makes a gift of them anew to the Son. He makes this gift to the Son so that they have to receive everything from the Son. What is important now is not their personal sacrifice or their faith's greater or lesser satisfactoriness. What is important is: "Listen to him," that is, to the word of the Son, which now is placed in a new light by the Father.

"The Transfiguration helps the disciples and us to understand that the Passion of Christ is a mystery of suffering, but it is, above all, a gift of love, of infinite love on Jesus' part. The event of Jesus transfiguring himself on the mountain enables us to better understand his Resurrection (Pope Francis)."

After the disciples climb up the mountain, see the Lord transfigured, and witness the conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, God the Father speaks. Upon seeing Jesus with Elijah and Moses and witnessing his Transfiguration, Peter offered to build three tents for them. Mark reports that the disciples are terrified by what they have seen and that Peter's offer is made out of confusion.

In reply to Peter's confusion, a voice from heaven speaks, affirming Jesus as God's Son and instructing the disciples to obey him. (Pause) Last Thursday, we were celebrating the Feast of "The Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle," and in Matthew's Gospel that day, it was Peter, like always, who answered Jesus' question to the disciples when Jesus asked, "But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon, Son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. In Matthew's Gospel, we see Peter listening to God the Father with his heart, and a few days later, Peter couldn't grasp what the Father was saying. Remember that God the Father speaks only three times in the New Testament: at Jesus' baptism, at the Last Supper, and here. But what he says is somewhat strange when you think about it. After pronouncing Jesus once again as his Beloved Son, God the Father thundered, "*Listen to him!*" How strange is this? After all, what had Peter, James, and John been doing for the previous two years but listening to Jesus?

They listened to him when He called them from their boats to be fishers of men. They heard him speak about all his parables. They listened to the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon on the Plain, and the Bread of Life Discourse. They listened to him teach them how to pray. They listened to him instruct them as they walked along the streets of Palestine. They listened to him when he calmed the storm.

They listened to him correct the deceiving scribes, Pharisees, console widows, and sinners.

They had spent the last two years constantly listening to Jesus!

But God the Father noticed something that they had not grasped. They had been selectively listening to Jesus, and they had been particularly tone-deaf to what Jesus had been saying about how he was going to be betrayed, suffer, be tortured, crucified, killed, and on the third day be raised. No one likes to hear a bad ending!

They didn't want to hear it. Jesus told them what would have to happen, not once, not twice, but three separate times, but they didn't want to listen to it. When Good Friday came, most of them were not even present.

Peter denied Jesus in the high priest's courtyard, and James, like the rest of the disciples, abandoned Jesus. Only John listened to Jesus and was not scandalized by the passion and death of Jesus. In John's Gospel, we read that John went right into the high priest's courtyard while Jesus was being put on trial (John 18:16) and went all the way to the cross with the women (John 19:25-27). When the crisis came between Holy Thursday night and the first appearance of Jesus on Easter Sunday, Peter and James did not listen; they abandoned Jesus.

What they were even less willing to hear was what Jesus said after that, namely, "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*" (Mt 16:24).

My beloved brothers and sisters! To be Jesus' disciple, to be able to follow him, they needed to say no to their earthly ambitions, desires, and goals and be crucified with him. They had to listen!

God the Father, who could see their hearts, knew they were ignoring what Jesus was saying about his need and their need for suffering; that's why he said, "*Listen to him!*" The same Father gives us the same command today. On Ash Wednesday, Jesus said, "*Repent and Believe in the Gospel!*" Have we? Jesus called us to almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Are we doing all three? Are we growing in self-denial and self-death through the crosses God gives us and in following Jesus and his words?

Perhaps we are disappointed that Peter and James did not listen to Jesus and did not remain faithful to Jesus when he needed them the most. They had seen Jesus transfigured and heard the command of the Father to listen to his Son. They had been with Jesus for other intimate moments, but they were scandalized by the Passion of the Lord. However, why should we be disappointed with them? We have also experienced and met Jesus in many ways, and sometimes we, too, let him down.

- We meet Jesus most intimately every time we receive Him in the Eucharist. It is the time when we are closest to Him.
- We meet Jesus in the Scriptures as they touch our hearts. Jesus speaks to us now when we read the Scriptures. The Scriptures are not just about the life of Jesus; in the Scriptures, Jesus also speaks to us about our lives, and in them, we meet Jesus as he speaks to us about how to live our lives.
- We meet Jesus in an extraordinary way in all the sacraments.

- We have seen Jesus in great people like Saint John Paul II, Saint Mother Teresa, Saint Oscar Romero, Saint Ignacio of Loyola, Saint Augustine, and Saint Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio.
- Also, we have seen and met Jesus in the person sitting next to you, in front of you, or behind you, and in the person sitting in the last pew of the church.

My beloved brothers and sisters in this Lent, we need to meet Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation often because there are times, as the disciples, when we do not listen to God's beloved Son—times when we deny Jesus, not in the courtyard of the high priest in Jerusalem, but maybe sometimes in our families, or perhaps where we work, or maybe in our communities.

Before I finish, I want to share a story with you about Saint Jerome from the book *"Mother Teresa's Secret Fire": Saint Jerome – Father of the Church and the first to translate the Bible into the language of the day.*

After many years spent in Jerusalem translating the Word of God, Jerome finished his grand project just days before Christmas. To celebrate his accomplishment, Jerome decided to spend Christmas Eve nearby Bethlehem, praying in one of the many grottoes that dot the countryside. According to the ancient account, sometime around midnight, Jesus appeared to him, saying, "Jerome, what will you give me for my birthday?"

Immediately and enthusiastically, Jerome declared, "Lord, I give you my translation of your word." But instead of congratulating him, Jesus simply replied: No, Jerome, that is not what I want."

Jerome was speechless. Then he began to complain and remonstrate (protest) with Jesus, asking why he had let him go for forty years, far from home, laboring at something other than what God most wanted from him. But Jesus remained silent. Jerome started suggesting other ways of honoring Jesus' birthday – fasting, becoming a hermit, and giving his possessions to the poor. To each of these, Jesus replied, "No, Jerome. That is not what I want most."

Finally, Jerome protested, "Then you tell me, Lord. Tell me what would give you most joy on your birthday, and you shall have it." "Do you promise, Jerome?" "Yes, Lord, anything at all." Jesus replied, "Give me your sins...."

Lastly! In daily life, perhaps we may have problems, or we may have many things to resolve. Let us ask ourselves this question: what is Jesus telling me today? And let us try to listen to Jesus' voice, the inspiration from within. And in this way, we follow the Father's advice: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." At the same time, our Mother Mary will give you the second piece of advice at Cana in Galilee when there is the miracle of the [transformation] of water into wine. What does our Lady say? "Do whatever he tells you".

Listen to Jesus and do what he says: this is the sure path for all of us. Go forth with the memory of the glory of Jesus with this advice: Listen to Jesus and do what he tells us to do.