

LENT SUNDAY II "A"
MARCH 15/16, 2014

St. Benedict begins his Rule for the person who desires to encounter God by stating: "**LISTEN** carefully, my son (my daughter), to the master's instructions, and attend to them **with the ear of your heart**. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it and faithfully put it into practice." (RB, *Prologue*, #1)

High on the mountain in today's Gospel, the three disciples witness a dazzling sight as Jesus was transfigured before their eyes, his face as bright as the sun and his clothes as radiant as light. In the middle of this vision, they hear God's voice telling them to "**LISTEN to my beloved Son on whom my favor rests.**"

Lent is a time to **Listen to Jesus**. I would suggest, this is perhaps Lent's greatest challenge—to **LISTEN**. Listening and hearing are not the same thing. Hearing is the biological act of receiving auditory signals sorted and processed by our brain into patterns we name language or music. We are capable of hearing things singly or in combination with other sounds. Some we attend to, others we "tune out". **Listening**, on the other hand is a matter of the heart, a willed response of the mind and will, a deliberate choice. Listening demands total attention, complete focus on another, and like these vessels in front of the altar, being emptied of other preoccupations. Listening demands silence, stillness so the other and I who wish to be in relationship can speak "heart to heart."

We fear listening; its demands for silence and stillness. Culturally, we are conditioned to constant stimulation, constant reception of auditory stimuli, constant activity. How many of us, for example, the first thing we do upon rising in the morning is reach for the remote to turn on the television or radio, pick up our cell or I-phone and check our emails or tweets, (God forbid we actually turned it off while we slept!) or getting into our vehicles immediately turn on the radio or put an audio (and for some today video) disk in the dashboard or overhead player or plug in our MP3? Anna Steele our parish youth and young adult director has told me that the teens she encounters "freak out" when they come to a retreat and she requires them to turn in

their personal communication devices to be returned at the end of the retreat. And, from my observation, it isn't just teens who experience the terror of such "withdrawal."

Jesus and St. Benedict, along with numerous spiritual masters, all extoll the practice of listening, silence, and stillness as means to encounter and be encountered by God. Listening with its accompanying silence and stillness opens space for God in our lives and, practiced faithfully, strengthen us to overcome the temptations of the many voices we hear leading us away from the life God wishes to give us. In last Sunday's temptation story, Jesus was able to overcome the voice of the tempter enticing him to a life of materialism, power and self-centeredness because he practiced the discipline of listening with "ear of his heart" in silent stillness to his Father. The Gospels relate that Jesus regularly withdrew to places where he could be alone in silent, attentive listening to the Father. If we, like Jesus desire to develop an intimate relationship with God, experience transfiguring union with God, then we, too, must open space for him. God is not going to "outshout" our noise.

On Ash Wednesday I spoke about Lent being a time to "Come to Jesus" daily. Last weekend we were given the opportunity to select at least one form of prayer practice to assist us in opening space for God in our daily lives. I reiterate my hope that all of us can find at least **five minutes** each day to "turn off" all the noise we hear, become still and "tune in" in listening silence to God who has loved us in Jesus. Listening may at first be scary, because when we become silent and still, we will confront the real self we are, not the image we try to create with our internal and external noise. Going deeper we will be confronted by Jesus as he really is, not the image we may have created of him to keep him at arms' length; confronted by the Gospel's call to live its message of loving our enemies, being peacemakers, proclaiming liberty to captives, letting the oppressed go free, seeing and acting as God sees and acts and not as culture or political persuasion would have us see or act. Yet, if we take the risk of listening and remain faithful to its discipline, we are promised that our lives too will be transfigured, will one day be clothed in the glory that shines for us in Jesus. **LISTEN TO HIM.**