

“The Lord God opens my ear that I may hear.”

This is the first line from the first reading from the Book of Isaiah we just heard moments ago. It is almost like a continuation from last week’s gospel of Mark when the deaf man’s ears were opened – “Ephphatha; Be opened.”

Be opened to WHAT? To HEAR WHAT?? To hear all the noise we put up with in our world today? The train horns blaring from one end of town to the other and the hum of traffic outside our windows. The bickering, foul language, and loud voices of those wanting THEIR way over that of anyone else. The news of war, persecution, and murder around the nation and the world. Let’s not forget about those seeking food or shelter, or even those within our own households who’d like to talk about their own issues and concerns. Is that what our ears are to be opened to?

YES, and MORE, as we are called to not only hear what’s going on around us, but to LISTEN as well, that we may get involved in the hurt felt by others and then do what we can to relieve the pain; to give a LISTENING, rather than a deaf, ear. If our ears are not open, how will we hear, how can we LISTEN for the voice of God speaking to US, calling US into action.

HEARING something gets our attention; LISTENING brings us to knowledge and understanding. Just as we do every Sunday as we HEAR the readings, and, as if in anticipation that we might have missed something in the readings, we LISTEN with a little more intent to the homily, hoping to catch an understanding of what was read.

In today’s reading from St James a couple of words could have been substituted in this way: What good is it if someone says he HEARS but does not LISTEN? If I HEAR the call but dismiss it as just more noise what good have I done? But if I LISTEN and understand that the call is for me, and I pay attention to it and react accordingly, then I have done well. Hearing is a good thing, a VERY good thing, and it’s EASY to do. Yet listening is so much more important and it’s harder to do, because we have to work at it; we have to work at shutting out the background noise; we have to reposition ourselves to put our best ear forward; we have to pay close

attention to every word so we don't miss a thing; we have to concentrate to get the most out of it.

Think about what Jesus tells folks to do – come, follow me. Or from today's gospel where he says. "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, TAKE UP HIS CROSS, and follow me." I don't think I've read anywhere that Jesus tells someone, "Have faith in me, and just sit there and be saved." St James is right, faith of itself is dead if it does NOT have works. To have faith in Jesus means to GET UP AND DO, not just say "Alleluia, I believe." It is in LISTENING to the words of Jesus, not just hearing them, that we come to believe in what he says, and then DO IT for the glory of God. His words move us from faith to action.

Peter, in today's gospel, is a good example to us about hearing and listening. He HEARD Jesus say what MUST HAPPEN to him, that he will suffer, die, and rise after three days. Peter rebukes Jesus, he reprimands him for saying such things that surely WILL NOT HAPPEN. Peter failed to LISTEN to our Lord and was thus rebuked by Jesus for thinking like man thinks, and not as God thinks. Peter, a good and faithful friend to Jesus, still had much to learn about listening, and he did come around. We too can fall into this same pit when we just hear WITHOUT listening.

The noise and distractions are ever around us, and some say it's getting worse. So let us pray always to God that He keeps our ears open to hear His Word, our minds open to listen and understand His Word, and our hearts open to accept and act upon His Word.