

2020 - 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 12 July
2020

Hearing the Word of God, Understanding it and Bearing Fruit.

"Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear" (Mtt 13:16).

In last Sunday's gospel, the Lord Jesus answered one of the ultimate questions of the human heart. "Who is God or how can we know Him? Jesus said, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). Then, he issued an irresistible invitation to all, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves" (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus is the end of our quest. "Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's one, perfect and unsurpassable Word. In him the Father has said everything; there will be no other word than this one."^[1] St John of the Cross put it plainly, "In giving us his Son, his only Word (for he possesses no other), the Father spoke everything to

us at once in this sole Word - and he has no more to say. . . because what he spoke before to the prophets in parts, he has now spoken all at once by giving us the All Who is His Son.^[2] German poet and playwright, Friedrich Schiller, had his finger on this when he wrote Ode to Joy in 1785.^[3]

If we accept that Jesus is the fullness of the revelation of God and the end of our quest, it is necessary that we seek to connect with Jesus. The homily this Sunday is Hearing the Word of God, Understanding it and Having it bear Fruit. The key verse is “Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear” (Mtt 13:16). Hearing and understanding the Word of God is very important. Scriptures say, “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). To hear and welcome the Word of God into one's heart is to welcome God. God is the Word! Heeding the Word of God and connecting with Jesus stands or falls together. Welcoming the Word of God into our lives and living accordingly makes us family with God. In the last verse that precedes our gospel today, our Lord expressly stated, “Whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matthew 12:50). The will of our heavenly Father is revealed in His Word which comes

to us primarily through the Bible, and the Unwritten Word of God, also known as Sacred Tradition and the created world. Hearing the Word of God, and understanding it in order to bear fruit requires attentive listening and reading to the Word of God. This leads to Jesus for he is the Word made flesh.

The first reading, responsorial Psalm and the gospel reading center on the Word of God as that which brings new life and fruitfulness. The first reading presents the Word of God as the celestial rain that waters the arid soil of our souls and makes them fresh and fruitful. The Psalm emphasizing God's initiative in the matter says, "You have visited the land and watered it; greatly have you enriched it. God's watercourses are filled; you have prepared the grain" ((Psalm 65:10). The seed that falls on the ground so watered will yield a fruitful harvest" (Luke 8:8).

Through the parables of the Sower, the gospel presents four types of dispositions with which people receive the Word. These four dispositions correspond to four types of soil. The soil refers to the four classes of people. These four types of persons are:

1. "Those who never accept the word of the kingdom (Mt 13:19);" These are hardened paths on which the seed fell and birds ate it up.
2. "Those who

believe for a while but fall away because of persecution (Mt 13:20-21);' These are the rocky soils. The faith of these people is shallow. They do not commit. They are fair weather Christians.3. "Those who believe, but in whom the word is choked by worldly anxiety and the seduction of riches (Mt 13:22);" These are the soils infested with thorns and thistles. This class of people are worldly minded. They do not put the things of God first. 4. "Those who respond to the word and produce fruit abundantly (Mt 13:23)." These are the good soils that yield a great harvest.

What then is the seed? The seed is the Word of God. The question is to which group do I or my loved ones belong and what shall I do about it? How can you help a family or a friend who dismisses faith in God and the Church as irrelevant? Three key things might help. First accept the Word yourself. Second, pray for the one who does not accept, and third, encourage him or her to at least give religion the benefit of doubt by examining it before rejecting. It is not intellectually honest to reject what you do not know. It is like condemning a person in the law court without giving this person a chance to defend himself or herself.

Dear brothers and sisters, when the Word of God knocks at your door, open without delay. St Ambrose advises, "Open then your ears. Enjoy the fragrance of eternal life, breathed on you by means of the sacraments"^[4]and the Words of the living God. We have examples of those who opened their ears and hearts to the Word and those who did not. The former were always blessed and not the latter. THE First and foremost example of those who did not heed God are Adam and Eve, they received curses and plunged their progeny into the same mess. These curses were undone by Christ Jesus, who not only listened to the word of God, but was Himself the Word! An example, in the primeval history before Christ is Enoch. He heeded the Word walked accordingly. Enoch was given an eternal blessedness with God. In the later part of the history during a time like ours, in the eight century BC Israel, There was a man and wife, Ahab and Jezebel who did not heed the word of God. They suffered terribly on this account. Both of them died miserable and wretched deaths. On the other hand, Elijah, a contemporary of Ahab and Jezebel was like a good soil to the word of God. He received the Word of God and carried out it without swerving to the right or left and was rewarded with unheard of miracles. "The prophet Elijah arose like a fire, and his words burned like a torch. By the word of the Lord he closed the heavens. Again, he prayed and rain poured down

from heaven (1 Kings 17:1, 18:45; Sirach 48: 1, 3; James 5:17, 18). At the end of his life on earth, Elijah was carried into heavenly bliss in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11).

Nearer to our time, Martin Luther King Junior heeded the word of God through his peaceful and non-violent approach, racial segregation was put on the road to extinction.

You and I can be examples of those who listened attentively to the Word of God, understood and watched it bear fruit. There is blessing in hearing, understanding and living the Word of God. "The Lord's law is perfect. It refreshes the soul. The decree of the Lord is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart (Psalm 19:8-9).

[1] Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC 65.

[2] St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* 2,22,3-5 in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 179-180: LH, OR Advent, week 2, Monday).

[3] Jesu, joy of man's desire, Holy wisdom, Love most bright. Drawn by thee, our souls aspiring, Soar to uncreated light.

Word of God our flesh that fashioned. With the fire of life
impassioned. Striving still to Truth unknown, Soaring, dying,
'round thy throne.

[4] St. Ambrose, Catechesis on the rites preceding Baptism,
in The beginning of the treatise On the Mysteries, Liturgy of
the Hour, Office of the Reading, Ordinary Time, Week 14,
Tuesday.