

**March 12, 2017 Listen To Him Homily:** Brothers and sisters, in a recent report issued by the federal government on the state of America's health, it was disclosed that an alarming number of Americans suffer from a loss of hearing. Naturally, one would expect the elderly to be hearing impaired, but the study shows quite convincingly that young people are going deaf at an early age. Why? Excessive noise is the primary cause. Have you been in a theater lately? Or have you played one of the more violent video games? What do you know about "ear buds"? The noise can be deafening and very likely damaging to one's hearing. In most instances, we have only ourselves to blame for our partial or total deafness.

In the biblical world, deafness was a great tragedy because the one afflicted could not hear the Word of God. You recall that Our Lord healed the deaf and the mute. In doing so, he allowed them to hear, perhaps for the first time, God's saving truths. The opening prayer of today's liturgy asks the Lord for the grace to open the hearts of the congregation to hear His Words.

In today's Gospel reading, God speaks to three of Our Lord's disciples from a cloud, a symbol of God's abiding presence in the Old Testament. The same three, Peter, James and John, will turn up again on the night before their master's death in the Garden of Gethsemane.

For the second and last time in the Gospel of Matthew, we hear the only words that the Heavenly Father is ever recorded uttering: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". (Mt.17:5) The first time was the event of the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River, one of the luminous mysteries. In the account of the Transfiguration, Matthew adds the words: "Listen to Him"!

In Hebrew, to listen to someone sometimes means both to hear and to obey what is said. Upon hearing the heavenly voice, the disciples were very much afraid like the fearful Jews at Mt. Sinai when they heard God's voice. In a gesture suggesting worship and obedience, the disciples of Jesus fell to the ground as did the Jews on Mt. Sinai. But the disciples of Jesus have no reason to fear the voice from heaven. God is their Father. He has sent to us His Son as our savior and teacher. On the mountain Moses received the Torah, God's Word. Now we are told in reference to Jesus, "... listen to Him". (Mt.17:5) Jesus himself has become the Divine Word of revelation. Jesus himself is the Living Word, the embodiment of the Torah. The disciples are to listen to all that Jesus teaches and to live by his preaching. In one of his many meditations on the mystery of the Transfiguration, the erstwhile Pope, Benedict, writes, "To enter eternal life requires listening to Jesus, following him on the way to the cross, and carrying in our hearts like him the hope of the Resurrection".

In our secular culture, so many voices are heard and compete for our attention daily. Just reflect on the popularity of "talk radio" and the omnipresent social media. Has not the Word of Christ been overwhelmed by the din of the chattering classes of the entertainment and news industries whose representatives show nothing but contempt for the Divine Word?

A few thoughts:

1. Regarding God's Word and the teachings of His Church, are we partially or totally deaf? Are we selective in what we choose to hear?
2. How carefully do we listen to the Word of God?
3. How does Jesus speak to us? What will we do when we hear him?

As a young adult, the celebrated convert to the Catholic faith, Father George Rutler once entertained a famous visitor in his home, the renowned English poet W.H. Auden. As the two sat down for a chat, Mr. Auden heard music in the background. Fr. Rutler had been listening to music on his record player. Auden was displeased. He said to his young friend, "Do you want to listen to me or that?" Dear friends, do we really want to listen to Jesus or to someone or something else? Do we prefer the company of Jesus to that of a celebrity or even a close friend?

A prayer: God our Father, help us to hear your Son, enlighten us with your Word, so that we may find the way to your glory!

Amen!