

Homily
January 14, 2024
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
21:22 – 31:37

How many of you here are getting older? Everybody. It comes to us, doesn't it? And those of us who've reached a certain age realize that certain parts of our bodies do not work as well as they used to.

Such as the ears. You know, I can be in a room with a whole lot of people and I can't understand the person who's right here in front of me.

Why? Because I'm losing the top frequencies in my hearing. So my ENT tells me. And that's where all the distinctness comes from that cuts through all that babble around me. Anybody else have that? Yeah. Especially restaurants. Places like that. I can hear that something is coming toward me, but I cannot understand it. And therefore, I cannot listen. Without understanding, there is no listening, is there?

Why do I bring this up? Not for you to say, "Oh, poor him." It's just part of getting older.

Because both the First Reading and the Gospel zero-in on "listening." And being willing to "come and see." And being able to say, as the Psalm says, "Here I am, Lord. I come to do your will."

We all require the first: listening.

Now, the art of listening requires three things. Intentionality. You have to decide you're going to listen. It requires exclusivity. You're focused on that person, what they're saying and even trying to divine what's underneath it.

(How long have you two been married? Forty-five years. Do you ever have to wonder, "What is he saying?" Because there's text underneath it, right?)

The third thing that is required is intensity. It's hard work.

(To Joe Buennagel) How long have you and Tammy been married? Forty-four years. It's hard work isn't it? Listening?

We have to **intend** to do it. We have to really focus, **exclusively**. And you have to **work at it**.

In the First Reading, Samuel, as it says -- who has not come to know the Lord yet -- even though he is serving in the Temple at Shiloh, where the Ark is, learning from Eli, who has taken him under his wing -- hears a voice in his sleep. And we know the drill. He goes and Eli says, "Nope. Go back to sleep." Goes and he says it again. "No. Go back to sleep." And finally Eli listens underneath what the boy is

saying. And says, "It's the Lord. Go back to sleep and if the Lord calls you again, say this: ***Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.***" And he does.

There's a section of the text that's not there. In that section, Samuel intently listens to what the Lord has to say. He focuses. He stays with the Lord. Does the hard work and he is sent on mission. So much so that it took two books of the Old Testament to cover Samuel.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist has some disciples and Andrew is one of them. But as soon as the Baptist says, "Behold the Lamb of God," he abandons John the Baptist and goes toward Jesus. Obviously Andrew was listening very deeply. He was searching to begin with.

And he goes and he asks that wonderful question, "***Where are you staying?***" Which is not just "Where are you hanging out, sir?" It's more than that. ***Where are you? Who are you? I want to be there with you.*** And so he does and spends an entire day, along with another disciple.

But then, Andrew, as a good brother, goes and gets his older brother, Peter. He drags him in and says, "We have found the Messiah." Obviously, the two of them had at least talked about this before. They were searching. They were longing.

And Peter followed. He listened to his brother. And then he was moved. And it changed his life.

How many find "listening" an intense experience? How many find it at times, "I don't want to do it. It's too much work?"

Well, if we have that sort of – "It's too hard." Right? We have that going on in our lives (from time-to-time), because to truly listen means to be changed to be open to what the other says may change us.

How do you listen to God? Intently? Good! (To Joe Buennagel) Do you listen to Tammy that intently? You try. You'd better.

What is it that holds us to the point where we are going to **intentionally, exclusively** and **intensely** listen to the Lord?

How do you do it? When do you do it? Where do you do it?

Well, you're here today, right? This is one of the things we do here. You intentionally came here. You are exclusively focused on the Word and the Sacrament. And coming to Mass is hard work. Especially the listening part. It's not easy.

The person in front of us can distract us. The priest can have a sneeze that echoes throughout the room. And then we wonder, "Is he contagious?" It's just amazing what can get in the way of our listening to the Lord.

What about your prayer time at home? The book that you're reading that has a spiritual thread through it. The time that you talk with your spouse or your children about how the Lord is affecting us. It's all about listening.

If we are to come and see. If we are to say, "Here I am Lord. I come to do your will," we have to start with the exercise. And it's going to be wonderful. But it's also going to require a lot of us.

Let me suggest that possibly a way to guide each of us to that moment is -- whenever we come here, or we take time at home in prayer, or we pray with our children, or we read the Bible -- whatever -- we simply follow the example that Eli gave to Samuel:

"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening."