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Second Sunday of Lent

Thomas Gumbleton | Mar. 12, 2009 The Peace Pulpit

The most important part of the scripture message for us this evening that I hope we will take away with us as we leave this church and go back out into our daily lives are those words that the disciples hear from God: "This is my beloved son. Listen to him. " Listen to him.

If only we would do that. All of us. Each of us. Listen to Jesus. Listen not only to his words but listen too by watching what he does, how he acts. He speaks through his actions too. But listen to him.

St. Paul in writing to the church at Philippi pointed out how important that is when he said to those Christian, urging them to listen to Jesus. He said, "Have this mind in you which was in Christ Jesus." Have this in mind in you. See, when you listen to Jesus, you begin to change. You undergo a change in your thinking, in your attitudes, in your set of values. It changes you, if you have the mind, the heart, the attitude, the thinking of Jesus.

Today's Readings
Genesis 22:1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18
Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19
Romans 8:31-34
Mark 9:2-10
Full text of the readings [1]

It takes a constant effort to listen so that we will be changed.

In tonight's gospel, we can understand as we listen to it carefully how Jesus is the fullness of God's revelation. Everything that God wants to speak to us through the whole of the human race is contained in Jesus. That's why when he was transfigured and God glorified Jesus, there was Moses and Elijah with him. There wasn't any book of the Bible at the time of Jesus or during the time of the chosen people. There was that tradition that was passed on: the law and the prophets. That is how the word of God came, through the law. Moses the great law giver appeared with Jesus and is talking with him. And Elijah, the representative of all the prophets, those who proclaim God's word, are with Jesus. They leave and Jesus is alone. That is telling us that Jesus contains within himself the law and the prophets.

All that God wants to reveal is revealed in Jesus. That is why it is so important to listen to Jesus.

The other two lessons help us to listen to Jesus, if we hear them carefully. St. Paul in that second lesson is asking: How can any of us be afraid? "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Because God -- St. Paul is speaking to the church in Rome and says -- God did not spare even God's son. God came into our midst through Jesus.

Now when we hear those words, we very often think that some how when Jesus died on the cross, that he was paying a price for us, that God was demanding this of Jesus. But that isn't what is happening there. Jesus becomes one of us, so he has to enter into the world that we live in, a world that is filled with hatred and violence. A world where people are willing to kill other people, to respond to hate with hate, violence with violence. That is the kind of world that Jesus came into. God didn't spare Jesus. He asked Jesus to be one like us in every way except sin. And Jesus was like us. He entered into the same kind of worldly situations that we

confront.

What does Jesus teach us, if we listen to him? Because God did not spare him, he had to endure the hatred of people. They arrested him, tortured him and executed him. But how did he respond? This is what we need to learn. Jesus didn't respond to that hatred with hatred. He did not respond to violence with violence. He loved. He returned love for hate. Nonviolence for violence. He prayed for those who put him to death.

He showed us a new way. The way of Jesus. The way of love. He's gone that way before us. We have to listen and follow.

Can we do it?

The first lesson also shows us God even before God sent Jesus into the world. It is easy to misinterpret that lesson. It was put into the Hebrew scriptures because Abraham and Sarah were living in the midst of godless nations that thought it was right to appease the gods they feared by human sacrifice. So in a very dramatic way, God showed Abraham and Sarah that no you don't sacrifice your child. Stop, do not kill the child. Because God is the God of love. It is unthinkable for God to want human sacrifice. And yet Abraham had thought, misunderstood, was going to imitate those around him. But he heard God and listened and Isaac was spared.

We must continue to listen constantly for that voice of God. It is in our scriptures, the words of Jesus recorded, his actions described for us. But I wonder how truly we take the time to listen. There is an example for me, quite amazing in a way, it's in the newspaper for today, *The New York Times*. I read it on the airplane coming down. Thomas Friedman is a regular columnist. Two or three times a week, he has a column on the op-ed page. Listen to this.

> Let's today step out of the normal boundaries of analysis of our economic crisis and ask a radical question:

We all know that we are in this terrible economic crisis, and he says, let's ask a radical question.

> What if the crisis of 2008 represents something much more fundamental than a deep recession? What if it's telling us that the whole growth model we created over the last 50 years is simply unsustainable economically and ecologically and that 2008 was when we hit the wall ? when Mother Nature and the market both said: "No more."
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> We have created a system for growth that depended on our building more and more stores to sell more and more stuff made in more and more factories in China, powered by more and more coal that would cause more and more climate change but earn China more and more dollars to buy more and more U.S. [treasury]-bills so America would have more and more money to build more and more stores and sell more and more stuff that would employ more and more Chinese ...

It's an endless cycle. But what if we had listened to Jesus?

Instead we've fallen into this pattern of making more and more, selling more and more, creating more and more, destroying our planet in the process and actually threatening our economic well-being.

Didn't Jesus say blessed are the poor? How well have we listened to that?

Didn't Jesus encourage us: Don't put your security in worldly goods. Look at the birds of the air. They don't sow or reap or store up in barns. God takes care of them. The flowers of the field. Trust in God. Don't put all your trust in human, material goods. Jesus told us all that a long time ago, but we failed to listen.

And I find it amazing that Thomas Friedman is pointing this out. He says look at this more radically. The whole system is wrong. And we add to that, Jesus told us that a very long time, but we forgot or failed to listen.

The other extraordinary thing that is happening in our midst right now is the violence going on in our world. He have almost six years of war in Iraq. We've spent almost a trillion dollars of our wealth and we have left behind hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women and children who are killed. We left behind an ecological crisis in that country. We've allowed or caused 2.5 million of those people to flee the country. Exiled refugees living in terrible poverty. Another 2.5 million internal refugees, inside their own country. Tens of thousands suffering.

What if we had listened to Jesus? Don't return evil for evil. Return good for evil.

What if we had listened to Jesus, proclaimed by St. Paul when he was speaking to the church at Cornith, "Here am I preaching a crucified Christ. To the Jews it's a scandal. To the Greeks it's madness." Why? Because a crucified Christ is a Christ who refuses to hate. Refuses to return violence for violence. But rather returns love for what is being done to him out of hatred. The way of Jesus is the way of love, but we refuse or fail to listen to what he has taught us.

Perhaps this evening as we listen to the word of God in this liturgy, we will commit ourselves to try to listen deeply, not only to this evening's scriptures, but to the whole message of Jesus where he came to teach us how to become fully human, how to enter into the reign of God where everyone would have a full human life, where there could be peace in the world. Perhaps we will commit ourselves to listen deeply to Jesus, so gradually we will take on the heart, the mind, the attitude of Jesus. We will begin to follow him faithfully.

And we will begin to transform our world into as close an image of the reign of God as possible.
A world where peace will prevail, a world where people will have full human lives. This is what can happen if we listen to Jesus.

As I said at the beginning, I hope that as we leave this church this evening, we will commit ourselves to listen deeply, every day, to Jesus speaking deep within the depths or our hearts.

(Bishop Gumbleton preached this homily at the Oratory, Rockhill, S.C.)

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