

# 2nd Sunday of Lent A - St. Elizabeth Seton Parish

## Introduction

Not long after I started serving as the Bishop of Bridgeport, Connecticut, my new doctor told me I should have a complete physical exam. So one day I underwent an amazing battery of tests and not long afterwards the doctor phoned to tell me the results. After that call concluded, my priest secretary (not my current one), asked, "Well, Bishop, what kind of shape are you in?" I answered, "The doctor told me I'm in good shape, except for my hearing." To which my priest secretary replied, "I could have told him *that!*" He meant to say, of course, that I didn't listen very well.

As every husband or wife knows, as every parent or teacher knows, there's a big difference between hearing and listening. Our hearing might be perfect but our capacity to listen may be less than perfect. Listening involves putting ourselves in the presence of the other, paying close attention to what the other person is saying, understanding not only the words but also the meaning of what is being said. Listening means not conjuring up a rebuttal when we hear something we don't like, but trying to discern the truth and values in what is being said to us.

## With Peter, James, and John on the Mountain

With all of that said, let's now ascend the mountain with Peter, James, and John. Here the Lord Jesus' glory is revealed, the glory he shared with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit from before the foundation of the world, from all eternity. Scripture describes a breathtaking scene: Jesus becomes dazzling like the sun; Moses and Elijah are there to confirm that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. The voice of the Father is heard, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him!"

In that moment, prior to the crucifixion, when the glory of Jesus was revealed, God the Father did not thunder a detailed series of commands. He did not command Peter to build three tents, that was Peter's way of coping with a vision too great for words. No, to Jesus' three closest followers, the Father gave only one command: "This is my beloved Son, listen to him."

“A wasted opportunity,” we might be thinking. After all, while the window of heaven was open, we might have thought that God the Father would tell the disciples everything. But, no, he only asked them to listen, to listen to Jesus. And that raises another question in our minds: Weren’t they already listening? Had they not heard the Sermon on the Mount? Weren’t they there when Jesus proposed the parables and the explained them? The answer is “yes” but they listened *selectively*. The disciples tuned out what they didn’t want to hear, especially when Jesus foretold his death for the forgiveness of sins and told them they would have to imitate his sacrificial love.

### **Down from the Mountain**

Now, let’s come down from the Mountain and inquire about our own lives. It is so easy for us to listen selectively, whether we are at home, at work, or at leisure. How readily we interrupt others when they speak to us. How quickly we shift the focus of conversation away from others & towards ourselves. And how subtly we tune out what we really don’t want to hear or have to deal with. Here all of us, myself very much included, should examine our consciences.

And if we have a hard time listening to one another, we shouldn’t imagine that we find it easy to listen to God’s Word. When we fail to pray and fill our minds with a lot of noise, we don’t even give God a chance to speak to us, let alone listen to Him. If we never open a Bible and spend time prayerfully reading the Word, or when we miss Mass on Sunday, or shut out teachings we don’t like, or stop examining our consciences in the light of God’s Word... then we fail to listen to the beloved Son when his heart tries to speak to our hearts. Then we are at best listening only selectively.

### **A Lenten Goal**

Already we are beginning the second week of Lent. It might be the case that our Lenten resolutions are already broken. It might be the case that we’re ready to throw in the Lenten towel. Today’s liturgy urges us to do otherwise. It suggests we might make this our Lenten goal: to move from being *selective* listeners to becoming *attentive* listeners to God’s Word. In other words, let’s make this the Lent when we get in the habit of obeying our heavenly Father’s command: “This is my beloved Son, listen to him!” But how?

First we must regard Jesus as truly the beloved Son of the Father. With all the graces God gives us, we must place ourselves in his presence and like the saints we must listen to his voice. We must let a very simple but profound message penetrate our hearts: “Jesus Christ loves you. He gave his life to save you. And now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen, & free you” (EG, 164). Once our faith in Jesus comes alive in the power of the Holy Spirit, once we regard Jesus as the Beloved Son of the Father & as our Savior, then we will say, “Speak, Lord, I love to listen to your voice!” And like Peter we shall say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!”

Once that basic message hits home, then, going to Mass, reading Scripture, studying the Church’s teachings, and examining our consciences each day in the light of God’s Word—won’t be so hard! All this will draw us closer to the One we love, to the Lord who loves us so. And the more we listen the voice of the Lord, the greater will be our capacity to love God and to love others. And the more we love those around us, including our spouses, our children, our co-workers, & even our enemies, the more attentively we will listen to them too.

### **Conclusion: The Glory of the Lord**

Here is one final point to take away. Peter, James, and John were utterly amazed when they saw Jesus glory. They couldn’t imagine in that moment how they would one day share in it. And perhaps we can’t either as we go about our daily routine...but we can! The way we share in the Lord’s glory is to listen to him attentively to all that he tells us in moments of prayer, in Scripture, in the sacraments, and in and through the teaching of the Church. As we listen attentively and welcome the Word of God into our hearts, we are transformed little by little, from sin to grace, and from grace to glory. As person grows in sanctity, he or she may wear the same old clothes but there is an inner beauty and joy that takes root in the soul and begins to be seen in his or her words and deeds.

Now, we have found the glory of these 40 days! It’s listening to the voice of the beloved Son! May God bless you and keep you always in His love!