



### **Contributed by Fr. James M. Donohue, C.R.**

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<https://msmary.edu/alumni-and-friends/stay-connected/podcast/index.html>

### **TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME September 5, 2021**

#### **GATHERING TIME (10-15 Minutes)**

#### **Introduction to the Word:**

When I was 11 years old, we moved from the city of Toronto to the city of Burlington. Our family move happened shortly after the school year began, so my 3 brothers and I had to find ways to insert ourselves into St. Raphael's elementary school, which had already begun classes. I remember feeling a fair bit of pressure to fit in and to be accepted by my new sixth grade classmates. Things were going well for the first week, but then something happened in the second week that could have derailed everything. It started to rain while we were having lunch at home. My mother thought that it would be prudent for us to wear our boots and bright yellow rain coats—that also came with matching bright yellow floppy hats—as we walked back to school. My brothers and I pleaded, begged and even cried so that we would not have to endure this assault to childhood "coolness." What would our new friends think of us? Everyone would call us "sissies" or even worse! No matter our opposition, my mother was not going to yield. There we stood, in the garage with its door open, holding onto our rain coats, continuing our protest, when my mother shouted at the top of her lungs, "If you kids don't put those boots and raincoats on right now, I am going to squish you like worms!" Finally, we "heard" her.

An interesting corollary is that, up to this point, none of our new neighbours had come to the house to introduce themselves and to welcome us into the neighbourhood. I remember my parents talking about this at dinner time, wondering if this were an unfriendly neighbourhood. It turns out that five different mothers stopped by that afternoon to introduce themselves to my mother. They told her that they could not help but overhear her "discussion" with us in the

garage, and wanted to tell her that they really “liked her style.” My mother had become the new inspiration and hero to all the mothers on our street! Apparently, they “heard” her also.

As an aside, I should point out that my older brother Brian, who was not much of a rule follower, suggested that we take our raincoats off when we got to the top of the street, stash them under some bushes, and then put them back on when we returned home. Of course, we listened to him. His words seemed to make much more sense to us! This was the voice that we really wanted to hear!

### **Warm-up Activity:** (*about 8 to 10 Minutes*)

How many times have we been at a party or gathering where we are introduced to someone, and realize that we have forgotten the person’s name within seconds? How many times have we encountered someone who speaks a different language, and find that we are compensating for misunderstanding by raising our voices? How many times have we asked to have instructions repeated because they “went in one ear and out the other?” How many times have we talked to someone who heard the same news report or lecture or homily, and realize that we each heard what we wanted to hear?

Am I a good listener and how do I know that?

Am I conscious of the times I block what is being said to me, and why? By members of my family? By co-workers or friends? By the Lord?

Are there times that I can identify when I have regretted not paying more attention and listening to another?

## **The Table of the Word**

### ***Listening to God’s Word at Eucharist***

The liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council addressed both the *breadth* and *structure* of the readings that Catholics hear on Sundays at Eucharist. Addressing the *breadth* of Scripture, the reforms intended to familiarize Catholics with the Scriptures by introducing three cycles of readings, organized around the Gospels: Year A featured readings from the Gospel of Matthew, Year B from the Gospel of Mark, and Year C from the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of John is used throughout the Easter season, as well as on different Sundays in Advent, Christmas and Lent, and during the summer months in Year B when the Gospel of Mark is used. In the latter case, John’s Gospel helps to supplement Mark’s Gospel, which is the shortest of the gospels, by including the Bread of Life Discourse from John at the point that the Gospel of Mark introduces the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. The *structure* of the Sunday readings focuses on the Gospel and selects the First Reading—usually from the Old Testament—in relation to the Gospel story. In turn, the responsorial psalm “responds” to the first reading. Hence, there is a relationship among the Gospel, the First Reading and the Responsorial Psalm. For its part, the Second Reading is a continuous reading from different New Testament texts that only relates to the “theme” of the other readings by chance. Here, we could say that the Second Reading is another attempt in the liturgical reforms to help Catholics expand their *breadth* in hearing and understanding the Sacred Scriptures. As an aside, many Christian churches adopted the Roman Catholic lectionary, following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

### **Penitential Rite:**

Leader: Our God is constantly revealing Himself to us. He speaks to us, yet at times – in our human condition – we do not listen.

**Lord Jesus**, you speak to us the words of life,  
**Christ Jesus**, you call us to listen to your words,  
**Lord Jesus**, you yearn for us to be transformed,

**Lord, have mercy.**  
**Christ, have mercy.**  
**Lord, have mercy.**

### **Let us pray:**

O God, source of all that we have and are,  
give us listening hearts to receive your Word with gladness,  
and be willing to act on it, through the abundant grace you send us.  
Help us to be faithful listeners to your words of life, calling us to be and do more,  
and to make you present where we are, and with whom we are.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, whom you sent to give us the fullness of revelation, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME**

*(As Christians we believe that the WORD of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life-story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)*

#### **FIRST READING:** Isaiah 35:4-7

Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

#### **SECOND READING:** James 2:1-5

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **GOSPEL:** Mark 7:31-37

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Returning from the region of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Decapolis. They brought to him a man who was deaf and who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. Jesus took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And immediately the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, “He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*Pause for a brief reflection on the scripture readings.*

## **COMMENTARY:**

**First Reading:** Most scholars assign this part of Isaiah to Deutero-Isaiah (=Second Isaiah), a later prophet who is writing to the Israelite exiles in Babylon. Previous chapters have described God’s judgment on the nations, but this chapter describes how God will come to the exiled Israel with mercy and restoration. One could say that Israel lives in a “fallen world” where people experience alienation within themselves: physical limitations of being blind, deaf, lame, and mute. In turn, these physical disabilities often affect relationships with others, where people in these conditions were often shunned and neglected. The fallen world also includes the brokenness within nature and the alienation that humans experience with God. The encouragement “to not be afraid” signals that this alienation is about to end because the merciful and restorative power of God is about to enter into the fallen world, restoring not only the wholeness of human beings and their relationships with each other, but also their relationship with God. Nature also partakes in this new creation, as waters break forth in the wilderness, streams flow in the desert, and burning sands become pools of life-giving water.

**Second Reading:** James provides straightforward criticism of favouritism within the Body of Christ. He appeals to Jesus as the measure of how we should treat one another. Jesus gathered a new family around himself; it is not founded on blood but upon conforming oneself to Jesus. Doing so creates unity with Jesus and a willingness to serve one another. This, of course, involves sacrifice in following the example of Jesus who embraces suffering and the cross for the sake of others. According to James, those who are not united with the poor have missed the opportunity to share in the blessedness of the poor through their service. In James’ message, we hear echoes of the response to Jesus in Matthew 25: “When did I see you hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned...?”

**Gospel Reading:** Our first reading from Isaiah points to the day when God’s intervention will change the lot of people, bringing restoration and healing. (Isaiah 61, which Luke 4 draws upon when Jesus begins His public ministry, reveals a similar transformation when good news is brought to the poor, the broken-hearted are healed, the blind are able to see, etc.) As Jesus’ ministry to those who are poor and in need of healing progresses, it becomes clearer that the Day of the Lord has arrived in the person of Jesus. This is the long-awaited day when God will

intervene in history restoring all that is broken. In this gospel story, we see that this man who cannot hear or speak, is healed in stages: Jesus first touches the man's ears and tongue, and then looked up to heaven and said, "Ephphatha!" (That is, "Be opened!"). This is similar to a subsequent story, where Jesus heals the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk 8:22-26) in stages: Jesus first touches his eyes with the man reporting that he "sees people looking like trees and walking," and then Jesus lays His hands upon him a second time so that he can see clearly. This healing process or healing in stages is a foreshadow of how the disciples will struggle to be able to "see" and to "hear" Jesus with true understanding as they journey with Him along the way to authentic discipleship.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

### 1. "*Cheer up! Don't be afraid.*" (*Isaiah 35:4-7a*)

The words of Isaiah cannot help but inspire hope and confidence.

How have we experienced that new life we receive from God?

How have we experienced the substantial changes that we hear of in this reading: the blind will see, the ears of the deaf will be healed, the lame will leap around like deer, tongues once silent will begin to shout, water will rush through the desert, scorching sand will turn into a lake, and thirsty ground will flow like fountains?

Have we felt "rescued" by God?

### 2. "*My dear friends, pay attention.*" (*James 2:1-5*)

Listening should bring a response. There should be signs of that message being received, reflected in our words and actions.

What are the signs, in our lives, that we have truly listened to God?

How has our attitude and behaviour changed towards "the poor?"

What other significant changes can we relate to having listened faithfully to God?

### 3. "*Be opened!*" (*Mark 7:31-37*)

Jesus brought new life to the man in the gospel, giving him hearing and speech.

What has the call of Jesus opened us up to?

How have we experienced new life?

What does our "hearing" and "speaking" look like today, because of having opened up to the Lord?

## CARING - PRAYING TIME (15-20 minutes)

### 1. **Word for the Week:** "Be still and know that I am God" (*Psalm 46:11*).

### 2. **Suggestions for the Week:**

Our readings this week leave no doubt that God is with us, on our side, gracing and blessing us. His influence in our lives has brought about significant change and growth. "Opening up" once, if it is sincere, can only result in opening up more and more. Fear and doubt disappear, and we can more easily see how God can, and does, act in our lives. If we are "opening up," it also implies that we are closing off something in our lives – fear, doubts, hatred, mistrust, jealousy, envy, impatience, selfishness, and so many other feelings and attitudes that build walls between ourselves and others, and between ourselves and God as well. This week, be more aware of opening yourself up, through

God's grace, to share more fully in the life of God and in the lives of others. Open doors and windows of your mind, heart, and life to let in new life – as the Church did when it opened itself up at the Second Vatican Council. Give the Holy Spirit a new role in your life this week, and be prepared for graces and blessings.

### **3. Intercessions:**

God is forever generous with us as we turn to Him, and express our needs that reflect His holy will.

That our Church leaders will be more attentive listeners to the voice of God, which calls them to love and serve as Jesus did, we pray ... **Lord, hear our prayer**

That we may open ourselves to the saving Word of God, and allow it to touch our hearts and move us closer to God, we pray ... **Lord, hear our prayer**

That our spiritual deafness may be healed by the grace of God, opening us to a new life in Christ, we pray ... **Lord, hear our prayer**

That those whose (physiological) hearing is compromised will be provided with the means to more fully share in the life of others through enhanced hearing, we pray ... **Lord, hear our prayer**

That, in charity, we will be better listeners to one another, and use our time, talents and treasure to respond to the needs of others, we pray ... **Lord, hear our prayer**

For Pope Francis' monthly intention: that we all will make courageous choices for a simple and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, rejoicing in our young people who are resolutely committed to this, we pray... **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Let us pray:

O Lord God, thank you for not giving up on us when we have failed to hear your voice,  
and have not listened to your call.

Our faithful listening has brought us new life, and for that we give you thanks and praise.

Help us to keep listening, as you keep calling, and as the world remains in need of those who are  
willing to work for the renewal of society, and the building of your reign here and now.

We ask this through your Son, the Word-made-flesh, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we say as one, OUR FATHER...**

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