

18 January 2015

Homilists often find some Old Testament texts a bit obscure and a little hard to preach on. But there is great clarity in today's first reading. The Lord calls Samuel three times and we know the significance of 'three' in the scriptures when things happen three times or when something is said three times. In response to God's call, Samuel states three times, 'Here I am since you called me'. And the fourth time, Samuel responds, 'Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening'. Like a true disciple, Samuel is completely attentive to the voice of God and the will of God. Samuel wants to truly listen to what God is saying to him in his life. It got me thinking about the quality of our 'listening' in this modern age when from morning until night our lives are simply bombarded with noise. How do we listen with all the noise, and gadgets and distractions of life? Even as a priest, I think I am just as guilty as anyone else in terms of struggling to make time in my life for silence. The radio goes first thing in the morning. I listen to the radio again at breakfast. On busy days, both the parish phone and my mobile ring. I am engaged in many conversations. Friends send me text messages on my mobile and the phone pings. If I get an email or a facebook message, the mobile pings again. I might watch some television late at night and then fall asleep on the couch from sheer exhaustion. There is not much time for quiet prayer and meditation. It's a bit hard to preach to you what I struggle to do myself!!

And yet in today's first reading, everything for Samuel took second place in terms of listening carefully to the voice and call of God. All other distractions took second place because Samuel made it his top priority to be attentive to the voice of the Lord, to listen carefully to the call of God, to be eager in responding to whatever God was asking from him. This reading reminds us of the importance of the word of God in our lives of faith. These weekly readings for the Christian are food and nourishment. These weekly readings, obscure and hard at times, deepen within us the call of faith we first received in baptism, deepen within us our fundamental vocation to be disciples of the Lord.

In today's Gospel, there is a certain eagerness to respond to Jesus. This man is known by many titles – the Lamb of God, Messiah, Rabbi, Teacher. Because Jesus is such a good teacher, the disciples are hungry for the word, keen to be nourished, enthusiastic about learning

through the teaching of Jesus. The disciples are called to be attentive to the one who teaches. Throughout his ministry, Jesus often makes time to come away from the noise, to make time for prayer, to spend quality time with the disciples and the disciples with him, attentive to the word and listening to the Master. Just like in our day, Jesus too was caught up in all types of preoccupations and demands. But he made time for prayer and reflection and insisted that the disciples do the same.

We are those same disciples conscious that in the noise and stress of life only Jesus can satisfy our hungry hearts, only his word can fill us with hope, it is only the gift of the Eucharist that makes our life complete. And only our unity in faith gives us the strength when we struggle with daily life, hence Paul's reminder in today's second reading that we belong to the body of Christ. Through Baptism, there is a power working within us far greater than we can imagine. It is the power of faith; it is the power of God's word. And it is spoken by a Teacher who loves us, who gathers us together and who fills our hearts with joy.

Like good and faithful disciples, let us turn to the one who satisfies our hungry hearts and, like Samuel, say with faith and fidelity, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening'.