

## **Homily: Feb. 25, 2024**

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

Today, the Second Sunday of Lent, we celebrate God, who invites us to listen to his Son Jesus. We are limited human beings who never see the whole picture. Therefore, we suffer from diseases of the body and many forms of brokenness. When we listen to Jesus, our lives and the whole world will become new and healed. God is compassionate. So, we acknowledge his boundless love, calling out, “Lord, have mercy.”

In the first reading, we saw Abraham listen to and carry out God’s difficult call to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Abraham’s willingness led him to express and test his faithfulness to God. As a result, his son, Isaac, could live on and continue growing Abraham’s descendants.

In the Gospel, we heard about Jesus going to the mountain top, as he often did, to pray. He listened to God and experienced a transfiguration witnessed by his disciples, who became overwhelmed in awe. Even fast-mouth Peter didn’t know what he was to say except that he wanted to stay on the mountaintop and build tents. That was not quite what God nor his son, Jesus, wanted. Instead, God’s voice thundering from out of the cloud called Peter, James, and John and us disciples of Jesus to “LISTEN TO HIM,” Jesus, the Son of God.

Why listen to Jesus? Why should you and I listen to this Son of God? Before answering this question more directly, let me ask who, besides Jesus, have you heard speak or witnessed their action that affected you deeply—positively or negatively—to the point of changing your perspective and behavior? There definitely are consequences if that impactful person is of negative force or loving power.

We know that Hitler spoke captivantly, and gradually, many citizens believed his message and began to act on it. Hence the birth of the Nazis who listened devotedly to Hitler. They believed in Hitler to the point of drastic political, social, and military consequences—wiping out all non-Arians, most immediately the Jews. The further result of listening to Hitler was war and more death.

Quite the opposite happened with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a religious nun of love power. This humble nun spoke in words and deeds that were genuinely consistent. She listened to Jesus, the Son of God, whom she heard speak to her on a train as she traveled through India. Then she heard God call her through the destitute dying on the edge of the streets of Calcutta. She experienced a profound transformation in her life. She tended to the most destitute and helpless in society, treating them like God’s children and valuable human beings, even as they died. In only a few decades, her congregation, the Missionaries of Charity, grew to be thousands—today, over 5,000 in 139 countries. These women listened to Mother Teresa, and there was new life.

I want to say that her transformation and its witness was and still is the extension of the brilliant light of Jesus’ transfiguration. She contributed to making and healing this world into the Kingdom of God, where people will not suffer from war and where people who are ill will all get loving care and attention. No wonder she received many awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize for promoting love and healing that would have an international impact.

When we listen to Jesus, we become like him in some way or another. We become people increasingly dedicated to loving only, as did Jesus. We will love only ONE GOD, the God of love. God’s loving spirit will enable us who listen to him and his Son, Jesus, to forgive, unite, make peace, respect everyone, enjoy diversity, and heal others from physical, mental, and spiritual diseases no matter how serious and challenging their condition, no matter their religion, color, gender orientation, and cultural background.

Listening to God, Jesus, and their Holy Spirit and letting what we hear transform us into other healing Christs in this world is what Lent is all about.

For that transformation to happen, we must follow Jesus to some mountain top—a literal mountain top, a retreat, a prayer corner in your home, or a Bible reflection group to LISTEN TO HIM—TO JESUS! You may have Bible study groups, which are good for studying the bible. But, If you haven't yet, get some Bible-**Reflection** groups going, who meet regularly—weekly if possible, to answer one question, “God, what are you saying to me through this coming Sunday's Gospel [for instance]?” What God says heals something in our life. So, I invite you to sing this short antiphon several times: “Speak, Lord, I love to hear your healing words.” AMEN – AMEN!