

## THERE ARE THINGS WE CANNOT HEAR

*“You cannot hear My word,” (John 8:43)*

These words spoken by Jesus cause us a great deal of anxiety. I do not imagine, for one moment, that our Lord is speaking about the strength of His voice and the power of His projection. This may be a common complaint raised by many against the clergy, but not Jesus. Every word He spoke was audible to the crowd in the clear, still air of Galilee. Even the officers had to bear witness to this fact when they said they had never heard a man speak like this man. And so, we can picture the perplexity of those around Jesus when He said, **“You cannot hear My word.”**

One comes to feel that hearing the Lord was not simply a physical activity. It was rather the reaction of the soul to the syllables, words, and truth, which fell upon the ear. Just as two men look at the same scene, yet see very different things, so it is when we listen to the same set of words, yet we hear dissimilar thoughts. It was of such hearing, such spiritual receptivity, our Lord was thinking when He said, **“You cannot hear My word.”** For in truth, is it more than with just the ear that we hear? Do we not hear also with the character of the spirit? Is it not with all that we set our hearts upon and all that we struggle with in our lives? It’s every temptation we have met, every sin we have ever fought that determines what we shall hear or not hear as we take our journey through the world. If we live meanly, then we hear meanly, even though you are listening to the Lord Himself. If we live nobly, then we hear nobly, even though all that our ears catch is but commonplace.

There is a great responsibility in speaking, for in truth, we are held accountable

to the words spoken. But our Lord was keenly aware of the tremendous responsibility each person bears in hearing the spoken word. Such responsibility in speaking or hearing bears an equal share. Our discovery of an equal share of both speaking and hearing comes when we are willing to recognize our souls selective power of personality leads us inevitably to our soul’s desires of pride and prejudice. One of the best known Gospel narratives which illuminates the soul’s selective nature is in St. John when the Father’s Voice was heard. It’s recorded that, **“Some said it thundered, and others that an angel spoke to Him.”** It was the same Voice of the Father that broke on every ear, and yet to one it sounded like the angels, and to another there was nothing in it save the roll of thunder in the hills. Had the ear been the only instrument of hearing, this diverse record of hearing would have been impossible to understand. We are being instructed to understand that none of us hear with just the ear; we hear by what we are. We hear through our past, shaping our present for good or ill. We hear through our soul’s desires and habits to take the common things of life, interpreting and molding these things unconsciously to fit our imagined understanding of life. That is what is happening constantly between the speaker and hearer. Our verdict on others is our own verdict. Often our judgment of the clergy or sermons is really the judgment of ourselves of what we will or will not believe. We are listening, not with the physical ear only, but with our loves and hates, our dislikes and grudges, our soul’s pride and prejudice. We are listening with the hidden heart. That is why the Master said so sternly, **“You cannot hear My word.”** It is not the physical impossibility of our hearing. The impossibility is spiritual. Our prejudices,

jealousies, antagonisms make the real Christ inaudible to us, though we hear every syllable that falls upon our ears.

We hear our Lord say in the Gospel of St. Mark, **“Take heed what you hear,”** (Mark 4:24). That is a very different thing from saying, **“Take heed how you hear,”** (Luke 8:18). The truth, of course, is familiar to everybody, in which we cannot help the things we hear. None of us can escape the city’s roar when walking the streets. But our Lord knew that many things we hear depend really upon our character and would never reach us, if we were only different. There are those to whom we would never dream of gossiping; they do not hear it because of what they are. Nobody brings them nasty or lewd tales because of their known character. Most often, the sort of things we hear depend on the character we bear, therefore, we are responsible for the things we hear. This is why our Lord says, **“Take heed what you hear.”** The kind of things we hear is an unconscious revelation of ourselves. And that is why, too, looking across His audience, to whom His every syllable was clear, Jesus said, **“You cannot hear My word.”**

Today, it seems, the Lord’s own Body, His Church, hears less and less of what Christ has chosen to speak through His word. Central to God’s judgment upon the Church shall be what we have chosen to hear, not with our ears only, but spiritually with our hearts. Have we heard the Lord speak with only our souls, unbroken and unwilling to hear the Holy Spirit speak the Divine Truth of God’s Revelation and Discipline? Do our souls, unwilling to submit in obedience to God’s Absolute Authority and Power over life, desire and demand a temporal treasure made with human hands, casting from our lives the Eternal treasure made with Divine Hands?

Has the Church, Eternally Holy, forever Divine, supernaturally strengthened through God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, chosen to hear with ears only? And hearing with ears only, chooses not to hear the Lord’s words? Such judgment is God’s only, and yet, to hear God’s Voice speak to us through Christ and hear with only our ears denies the very possibility of Divine transformation made ready and present through the Holy Spirit.

The central theme of Lent shall always be: while there is still time. During this Lenten Season, it is never too late for God to transform us by His Holy Will and Purpose. The Rev. Billy Graham said, “When you come to Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart. Something new is added to your life supernaturally. You are transformed by the renewing of your mind. A new power; a new dimension, a new ability to love, a new joy, a new peace—the Holy Spirit comes in and lives the Christian life through you.” In truth, The Rev. Billy Graham is speaking our Lord’s words. He requires us to hear His words with the spirit and not with the soul. All too often, the Church has settled for hearing our Lord speak with the soul only. In this truth, the unbroken and willful soul will not allow the “Holy Spirit to come in and live the Christian life through us.” We measure our Christian lives by the finite and puny measures of our soul’s conditional desires to limit God’s infinite and abundant Spirit. We hear the Lord speak to us, but we don’t hear His Divine Truth really. We hear what we choose to hear and not what our Lord has chosen for us to hear.

The Season of Lent calls to each of us to: KNOW THYSELF. It’s the special time for looking deeply into our lives, discovering a closer and more special relationship to God. But most especially, it is a season to know

who God is calling us to be in this life and the life to come. A time to search our hearts, truthfully and humbly, asking ourselves the important question, “Are we where God wishes us to be in His Divine Life?” Most of us could answer “No, we’re not where God wishes us to be.” But, we can’t stop there, avoiding the important question of why we haven’t grown spiritually from last Lent to this Lent? God takes our spiritual measurements, probing us through His Holy Spirit to measure how much we have grown in the spirit. God knows such growth is by His authority and power alone, but it requires our permission for Him to grow us spiritually.

The Season of Lent, through the history and tradition of the Church, has always been a time for us to consider our “Sins” of past and present, confess them, repent of them, accept God’s Love and Mercy to forgive us of our sins, and then, to do the most important step—Move on with the journey in Christ. The way we deal with our sins is extremely important to our relationship with God. We can blame our sins on others, ignore our sins altogether and make excuses for our sins.

The truth is we all struggle with sin. None of us escape sin’s temptations. We all fail and fall in the struggle. I know from personal and first-hand experience that my sins never go away when I blame, ignore and make excuses for them. I have discovered over my many long years on the journey the best way to deal with my sins is what the catholic Faith has always taught: Bring my sins to a Merciful and Loving God; confess them, one by one; seek God’s authority and power to repent of them; learn from my sins; and then, knowing God Loves me and is Merciful to me, wanting the best for me—I move on. St. John’s First Epistle says it best, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive

ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness,” (I John 1:8-9). In other words, the best way to confront our sins is to confess them—straight out. No beating around the bush, desiring to hesitate and doubt what is right or wrong, playing our little mind-games of rationalization and justification which stems directly from our soul’s desire to play god. We know the truth of the Holy Gospel. Jesus Christ is the one, true, and right man to have lived on this earth. That’s why we believe and proclaim Him to be our Savior and Lord. First, Jesus saves us because we will and give Him permission to save us, knowing we can’t save ourselves, and then secondly, He becomes our Lord, because in truth, we make horrible and terrible lords over our lives. When we examine our sins honestly, what we discover is that we are either trying to be our own saviors or we’re trying to be our own lords. In either case, we make a mess of our lives, if we are not willing to be obedient and faithful to the one true Savior and the one true Lord of this life. We know this to be true, because we believe God has shown us the one “Righteous” man and the one “Deserving” man to merit eternal life in Christ Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

Our earnest and humble prayer of confession cleans out our inner closets. We know we do not deserve God’s forgiveness. We can’t earn His forgiveness by thinking we can make up for our sins by other acts of Christian Charity. God’s gift of forgiveness is His free gift to us. He gives His forgiveness because He loves us. It’s pointless to think we can earn our way out of sin. Only one man paid the price for our sins. “He did so willingly, as if each and everyone on earth

were the only one that ever lives,” said Augustine.

Lent is not the “Bad News” Season of the Church Year, but quite the contrary, it’s the best “Good News” Season I know. Thank God, in Christ, we have a place to bring our sins, to confess and repent. Thank God, He is willing to forgive and give to us the constant offer of being made clean. Our being made clean is God’s offer through the Blood of the Holy Lamb—Jesus. Thank God, Christ overcame temptation and sin, and through Christ, we, too, have the hope of overcoming our temptations and sins. And so, the Season of Lent is always a Blessed Season. It’s the Season of Divine Faith, Hope and Love in knowing and living God’s Love and Mercy in His willingness to forgive us all our sin.

The Lord, Jesus, said, “**My sheep hear My voice**”—we truly hear Him, not because we fear the Shepherd, but because we love the Shepherd. We hear His words, because, through faith and love, we are attuned to His message and His meaning. So does our Lord clearly recognize the tremendous responsibility of our hearing? **It is those who are of the truth that hear His voice, (John 28:37).**

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