

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
January 28, 2018

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All Saints Parish, Syr., NY

**“If Today You Hear God’s Voice...”**

I would like to begin with a brief reflection on that poor demented man in our gospel reading who created such a scene. Obviously, Jesus realized he was sick, broken, unloved and probably a person with no dignity whose self esteem was most likely zero, in spite of the fact it was the Sabbath. Jesus wasn't put off by this man's outburst when he said “What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth. Have you come to destroy us?” Jesus heard a cry for help and healed him. I think recognizing we have a problem can be the first step toward healing. **God does not see as we see**, God wants that part of us that we withhold perhaps out of shame or maybe out of fear... all that God wants of us is to bring that part of ourselves to be uplifted and healed with God's compassionate love. It is hard to believe, but real, that this shame or fear is something that can be a **gift** in itself (imagine shame or fear being a gift to give to God?) and it's offered to each and every one of us...which leads me to Psalm 95 **“If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.”** - the key word in that psalm response is HEAR! The afflicted man with all his demons heard God's voice and it freed him from years of suffering!

I'd like to share with you a story by Joyce Rupp (the author of the book we received here at All Saints for Christmas – Fragments of your Ancient Name) One summer day, she was sitting on her back porch immersed in preparing a talk for a conference on “Listening to God”... and as she leaned over her notebook she heard a bird singing a penetrating, melodious song.

The warbling went on and on, but she didn't bother to look or listen because she was concentrating on her work. Sound familiar? Finally, an inner stirring drew her to put her pen down. She thought, “Listen! Stop what you are doing! Pay attention to this beautiful song. It's too glorious to miss.” She looked up to find the source of the singing and saw a female house-finch seated at the bird feeder and a male finch perched on a branch nearby.

The male finch was singing to the female finch who pretended to peck at the food in the feeder, seemingly ignoring his enticing song. But finally, the female lifted up and flew away. The moment she left, the male bird's beautiful music stopped.” Isn't God always trying to get our attention, wanting to let us know how much we are cherished...but don't we sometimes act like that little female bird...we're busy about many things. It's only by listening to the melody of God that we will recognize and respond to what is within. Only then can we turn our hearts more fully to the God who constantly tries to get our attention.

Here at All Saints our consciousness has been raised to many of the global issues of our day: racism, homophobia, immigration, human trafficking and the list goes on. But how do the deepest longings of our lives meet the needs and suffering of this world if we're not tuned into the personal issues of what's going on in our own hearts? Deepening our personal relationship with God, prepares us to be truly sensitive to one another. Without this sensitivity it is almost impossible to be truly attuned and effective when dealing with the multiple issues we meet in our daily lives.

Daniel Groody, Director of the Global Leadership Program at Notre Dame says, “Discipleship begins with dwelling in Christ. It involves living with a heart open to love, a heart willing to change, a heart ready to serve, a heart disposed to pray...the world is hungry NOT for busier people but for bigger hearted people. The world seeks not only people who work for God but people who are so at home with God that they become a doorway into God.”

Fr. Mychal Judge, whose statuary graces our parish grounds certainly became a doorway into God to all those he met. These are his words:

“Lord, today take me where You want me to go.

Let me meet who you want me to meet.

Tell me what you want me to say.

And keep me out of your way.”

Sue Monk Kidd, a favorite writer of mine, wrote a wonderful book about 30 years ago entitled WHEN THE HEART WAITS. Sue tells of how when she was on a retreat at St. Meinrad's Abbey she had a difficult time of quieting down inside. One day while walking the grounds of the retreat center she noticed a monk, ski cap pulled over his head, sitting perfectly still beneath a tree. There was such reverence in his sitting that she thought he was the perfect picture of stillness. Later in the day she sought him out and told him how she saw him sitting beneath a tree – just sitting there so still. She asked him how he was able to sit so still in the moment and told him that she can't seem to get used to the idea of sitting doing nothing!

He broke into a wonderful grin and said, “Well there's the problem right there, young lady. You've bought into the cultural myth that you can never be doing nothing!”

Then he took his hands and placed them on her shoulders, peered straight into her eyes and said,

“When you're in the doing nothing mode, you're **not** doing nothing. You're doing the most important something there is. **You're allowing your soul to grow up.** If you can't be still, you can't become what God created you to be.” Sue knew in her soul that the monk's words were God's words to her.

So, again, what do we hear the psalmist say...

**“If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.”**

May we prayerfully pray: “Dear God, may my heart never be hardened. Please give me the necessary grace to have a listening heart. Amen.