

“Who’s Listening?”

Homily of September 9, 2006

by Fr. Brian Joyce

OK, admit it! This is a very curious scene. It’s curious. It’s out of date. It’s foreign to our culture, our way of doing things, our time and our customs. They bring a man who is hard-of-hearing to Jesus, which is odd to begin with, for us. And then he goes through this highly unhygienic, this germ-laden ritual, and he heals the man. That’s hardly acceptable in our antiseptic culture with latex gloves and surgical masks and antibacterial soap and washing our hands more than it’s ever been done since the days of Lady Macbeth. Plus, for healing, we don’t go to rabbis or to mystics or to saints. We go to the hospital. We go to the ER. We have our Medicare and our HMO’s and our health insurance, unless we happen to be members of those forty-six million American working families who have no health care whatsoever. Plus, another problem is deafness represents a very tiny percentage of our population and the scholars tell us that the man was not really deaf, that he had some kind of difficulty in hearing well and, because of that, he couldn’t speak clearly. And we have language classes for that, and we have loudspeakers for that, and we have hearing aids for that. So, all this talk about curing the deaf isn’t really necessary at all. It’s day has passed. Maybe, maybe....

There were two psychiatrists at the end of a day of work that was hard and hot and long and difficult. They sat down in the early evening and had a drink together. The first psychiatrist, his hair tousled and his face drawn, was wilted and he was completely worn out. And the second psychiatrist was composed and neatly dressed, very much at ease, relaxed and smiling. So, the first one said to the second, “Rumplemeyer...” (You know it’s a true story. I wouldn’t have made up a name like “Rumplemeyer.”) ...”Rumplemeyer, for heaven’s sakes, how do you do it? You listen to problems all day long. You listen to people’s fears all day long. You listen to their tragedies, to their anger, to their depression, to their unhappiness, to their neuroses. How, on earth, do you do it?” And Rumplemeyer smiled, took a sip of the drink and said, “.... Who listens?”

You know there is so much problem and pain and suffering in our world. We just look at the TV or look at the newspaper, there is so much of it, we automatically turn a lot of it off and we survive by not listening. You notice the followers of Jesus, those gathered around him, they either were part of the solution or part of the problem. They regularly brought people to Jesus for healing, whether it was the blind or the cripple or the paralytic or the deaf, and others shooed people away. And we have to look at ourselves and ask, “Are we part of the problem or do we walk with Jesus and try to be part of the solution?” I think there are three simple steps. One is to care, to be a people who care. Second (This is a hard one in our culture.) to be a people who

listen so that we're a people who notice where the hurts are and what's going on. And finally, to be a people who help, a people who make a difference.

The first step is to listen and care. You notice in the foldout of the bulletin, there is a description of "Just Faith," which is a process that a growing number of our parishoners have taken part in. It's a combination of reading, discussion, and hands-on visit to where the hurting is hopefully being healed. I want to take a few moments and invite Harry McElroy, parishoner here for twenty-two years, who took part in the Just Faith process last year. Harry, I am going to ask you to share with us.....

Thank you, Father. Good Evening. I've been a member of Christ the King Parish since 1984. That's all I was, a member. I did all the good things that a Catholic should do and probably for all the wrong reasons. When my wife Leona suggested that I join her in a Just Faith course here at Christ the King, I was a little hesitant, not knowing what was going to be required of me. And during the course, I became aware, for the first time, that the Catholic Church has a social mission. It's really the best kept secret. Just Faith provided an opportunity to become familiar with the traditions of Biblical justice and Catholic Social Teachings. It provided me with a glimpse of a large part of the world that goes unnoticed, even here in the United States. And it wasn't a pretty picture. Just Faith is a thirty week program and always will be a work in progress. The program asks a lot of its participants. But be aware that you might get jostled a little. Like me, the fear of the unknown always makes me stop and hesitate about making a committment, but it became a life-changing experience. Mother Theresa once said, "I can't do everything. But I can do something." This might be an opportunity for you to explore ideas that often go unexpressed and unexamined. Thank you.

There will be an information table outside. If you are interested, Just Faith is just one example of caring and listening and helping. You know, in the 1960's, Cardinal Seunens who was the Cardinal Archbishop of Brussels, of Belgium, and was the moderator of the Second Vatican Council, came to Berkeley, and that was the Free Speech time and a lot was going on. He spoke at Sather Gate and he said, "God has a very good design for us. He gave every one of us one mouth and two ears, and the ideas is we should be a people who listen twice as much as we talk." I think we have to learn, whether it is in our personal relationships or our relationship with the world around us, to be a people who show respect and listen to one another. In the early Church, the Christians were called "the people who see" because somehow the light of the Gospel and the light of Jesus helped them to see things differently, people who see. They were also called "the people who sing" because they were filled with joy, that knowing Christ Jesus and the gospel. I also think we have to be a people who refuse to be deaf, a people who listen. We live in a noisey, fast-paced world where the information we get is in thirty second sound bites and, most of the time, wrong.Most of the time, wrong. You have to find out more.You have to find out more. May we be a people, here at Christ the King, and throughout the world, a people who listen and who really care. Let us give thanks to the Lord who is so good.