

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Cycle A

July 10, 2011

St. Margaret Parish, Bel Air

A Problem: Listening

This afternoon I want to reflect with you on listening.

I believe that our culture has an issue with listening. Why do I say this?

When my father and mother were teaching my brother and me good manners, they taught us never to interrupt others when they are speaking. They taught us to listen and wait to speak until the other person is finished.

My experience in recent years is that we in our culture are frequently interrupting others when they are speaking. We can definitely see this on talk or news shows that seem to make this behavior normative.

We interrupt and do not listen. Or if we look like we are listening, sometimes we are just thinking about what we want to say as soon as the other person has finished speaking.

I also remember a simple, but rather wise old saying: *"God gave us two ears and one mouth."* The point is that if we are wise and courteous, we will listen twice as much as we speak.

Sometimes today we seem to act as if God should have given us two mouths and one ear. We seem to speak twice as much as we listen.

Soil Types and Listening

Today's gospel parable raises this issue of listening.

The sower or farmer is God or Jesus. The seed is the Word of God.

The soil represents you and me and different ways we listen to the Word of God. The question is: How well do we listen?

Do we really listen? I want to propose three requirements or virtues that we need – for listening to the Word of God and for listening to one another.

Listening to the Word

For listening to the Word of God, first we need faith. Faith means that we believe that this is really the Word of God himself.

We believe that the Word who is God really speaks to us in the Scripture. We believe that the Word or Son of God is really present in the inspired Word as it is proclaimed here at Mass or as we read it privately.

Second, we need humility. Humility means that we are aware that we are incomplete, that we are imperfect, that we don't have it all.

We are aware that we yearn, at least deep down, for completeness, for something beyond ourselves. We yearn for God, for a divine communication, for transcendence.

And third, we need openness. Openness means that we are awake and alert to the present moment.

We want to take in what is said. We are willing to have our attitudes and outlooks and feelings and behavior and relationships changed, changed because of the Word of God we listen to.

Listening to One Another

Now these same three virtues or traits are also essential for listening to one another.

First, we again need faith. Here faith means seeing the other person as made in the image and likeness of God.

We see others as in their own way revealing God to us. We see others as valuable, worthwhile, and having something to share with us.

Second, we again need humility. Here humility means that we see ourselves as one with, as bonded with others on the same human journey.

We do not see ourselves as above or better than others. We see ourselves and others as having similar wants and needs, similar challenges and hopes and all the rest.

And third, we again need openness. Openness means that we are willing to take in the experience of others and not just hold on to my own experience as normative.

We are willing to ask and try to enter into the life of others and not just talk about ourselves all the time. We are willing to have our attitudes and outlooks and feelings and behavior and relationships changed, changed because of our listening to others.

Conclusion

So, these three virtues or traits – faith, humility, and openness – they help us to be good listeners – listeners to the Word of God and to one another.

This listening might just help to ease and even resolve some of the problems in our lives and in today's world.