

## **Pro-Cathedral / Donnybrook**

14 March 2022

### **Welcome**

The key phrase for us in today's Gospel is: *This is my son, the chosen one. Listen to him.* We have come here to hear the word of God and to listen to God speak to us through the Holy Readings. We do it every Sunday and, while it may sound easy, in our world, listening is hard work, both externally and internally. It is hard externally: there's some much coming at us, news, music, phone calls, zoom meeting, emails, texts and WhatsApp. It is also hard internally.

### **Topic**

To pay attention to someone, to attend to someone, requires a kind of conscious change of gear.

### **Steps**

Years ago, I took part in a Marriage Encounter weekend. The purposes of marriage encounter was to help couples communicate better and there was an adapted version, which accommodated unmarried people. A helpful expression they had in those days was: "listening with your engine running." It meant that instead of really attending to the other person, you were waiting for a gap or a pause to get your opinion in. I guess we all do our listening, to some degree, with our engines running. The goal of the weekend was to get people to turn off their engines and just pay attention, to attend to, to be present to the other person, to what he or she was saying and perhaps not saying. The difference is great. A good example which many people experience is going to a counsellor. Counsellors are trained to listen and it is therapeutic when someone listens to you deeply, helping you to recognise what is happening in your life. It is a mark of respect. Attending fully even to people we love is at the same time hard work, therapeutic and joyful. It is life-affirming to feel you have been heard and understood.

It is also hard work, therapeutic and joyful to take up the invitation of today's Gospel: listen to him, that is to God speaking to us through Jesus. How do you, do I pay attention to what God is saying to me, to us? Brian Davis, the English philosopher and Dominican priest once asked the question: where is the word of God to be found. He gave a nuanced response, as you would expect from an eminent philosopher: The Word of God is to be found chiefly in the Scriptures. In other words, yes in the Scriptures but not only. We sense the presence of God very much in nature. I'm reminded of lovely lines from RS Thomas, reflecting a walk in the moors

There were no prayers said. But stillness  
Of the heart's passion – that was praise  
Enough.

God speaks to us not only on nature, but in the inner voice of conscience, in the experience of love (whoever lives in love lives in God), in the special moments of birth

and death, in music and song, and so on. But, as Brian Davies said, chiefly in Scripture. We read the Word of God every Sunday and every Sunday we are called to listen. One of the life-giving movements in our time is the practice of praying with Scripture – *lectio divina* or Sacred Reading. This can be done on our own, of course, but is done most richly with a small group of 8 or 10. In the different responses of all, collectively we become aware of the richness of the Word of God and its life-giving potential for ourselves.

A unique experience of listening has begun across the diocese as the synodal pathway becomes reality. Collectively, we are contemplating the future of the community of faith, the church. Collectively, we are being consulted. Collectively, we listen to Scripture and we listen to each other. It is the conviction of the Pope Francis that if we listen to each other with respect and love, the Spirit of God will be revealed and how we are to be in future will become clear. There is a repeated appeal in the Book of Revelation: "Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." This is exactly what we hope we are doing. We are very much at the very beginning. In most parishes, the process starts this month. Make no mistake. This is not a once-off "consultation" but the start of a new way of being the community of faith, a very different style of being church.

### **Conclusion**

The Synodal Pathway will be successful if we all try to listen deeply to each other and through each other to the Spirit of God. There is a discipline in this: often we listen "with our engine running". The Synodal process invites us to un-self-centred listening, a true discipline for everyone involved. It is not an accident that the fundamental prayer of the Jewish tradition is "Hear, O Israel." That prayer is echoed in today's Gospel: This is my Son, the Chosen. Listen to him."