

“The Body of Christ: The Ears of Christ ”

During this Lenten season, we will be paying closer attention to The Body of Christ. It is not my intent to romanticize His Body — to give it attention as if *it* were the object of our affection. It is my intent to give due respect to that Biblical double-meaning of the phrase: “the Body of Christ,” referring of course to the physical manifestation of the incarnate Christ, but also recognizing that we, the Church, has been collectively referred to as “the Body of Christ.”

What does that mean for our living out our Christian calling? What can we learn from the ways that Christ used His Body that we might become the better at living as His Body in the world. Tonight we focus on The Ears of Christ.

God always hears us. The Psalmist knows this quite well. ***“Give ear to my words, O LORD; he calls out, “give heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I pray.” (5:1) Or again, “O LORD, You will hear the desire of the meek; You will strengthen their heart, You will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed . . .” (10:17) Or again, “Because He inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live.” (116:2)***

As do the prophets: Isaiah: ***“See, the LORD’s hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.” (59:1) Daniel: “Incline Your ear, O my God, and hear. Open Your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears Your name.” (9:18)***

As did our Lord. ***“I knew that you always hear me,”*** He prays before the tomb of Lazarus. He was constantly in prayer, we are told — a sign that He trusted that God would be listening to Him. Indeed, with all of these, the assumption was that God was inclined to hear before we were ever inclined to ask. One did not need to catch the attention of God’s ear — He was understood as always ready to hear and ready to respond. This is why the Psalmist can repeat this phrase over and over and over again,

“Give ear, O LORD . . .” God delights to listen to us when we come to Him in adoration, in hope, in need, in despair.

This was mirrored also in our Lord Jesus throughout His ministry. The ears of Christ always heard the cries, the sighs and the whys, of the people he met. There was blind Bartimaeus crying out to Jesus, ***“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,”*** Jesus heard him, and gave the man his sight. Jesus not only heard, He overheard . . . complaints from the Pharisees, murmuring amongst the disciples, protests from the scribes. He spent an entire evening listening and talking with Nicodemus; we tend to focus on the talking He did — maybe we should give heed to how well He listened.

Because He did listen, when a man came seeking healing for his son who was suffering convulsions, the father sighed into the ears of Christ, ***“If you can do anything, have pity on us.”*** Jesus replied, ***“All things are possible to those who believe.”*** Then the father spoke faithfully to the ears of Jesus, ***“I believe! Help my unbelief.”*** That is patient, loving listening! This man came challenging Jesus’ capabilities while seeking a favor — Jesus heard behind the words and comprehended this man’s anxiety and pain. He listened to him very deeply.

We long to be heard. There is a principle that must be applied in counseling to every session: ***“It is better to be unavailable than to be inattentive.”*** This reminds those whose task is listening that not listening can cause great harm to a relationship. I once asked a professor why listening is so therapeutic; his answer was that nobody knows why, we just know that it works. There is likely no better feeling than to be truly listened to; there is, conversely, perhaps no worse feeling than not being listened to.

We all long to be heard . . . when we are in pain . . . when we are filled with pride or joy . . . when we are confused, and need someone to help point a way to go. And we all long to hear: We like to hear encouragement from people. We need to hear spouse and family say, ***“I love you.”*** We like to hear employers and supervisors say, ***“You did a***

good job.” We like to hear friends tell us, *“Your thoughts and ideas are important to me.”*

The ears of Jesus heard it all. Jesus did hear some encouragement from those who heard and followed Him. When he asked the disciples, ***“Who do people say that I am?”***, the ears of Christ heard Peter's answer, ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*** Martha, at the death of Lazarus, expressed her faith in the hearing of Jesus, ***“Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world.”*** At the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus heard the crowds and the children crying, ***“Hosanna to the son of David!”*** Such words must have soothed Christ's ears.

But the ears of Christ also heard opposition from the scribes and pharisees. ***“Why do your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders?”*** ***“By what authority are you doing these things?”*** ***“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”*** ***“He casts out demons by the prince of demons.”*** Such words had to have saddened Him.

The ears of Christ heard how even his disciples and friends were often confused and perplexed by Jesus rather than supportive. After hearing a parable Peter said, ***“Explain this parable to us.”*** After the disciples failed to cast out a demon they said, ***“Why could we not cast it out?”*** The ears of Christ finally heard his disciples desert Him and the crowds of people turn on Him. His ears had heard Peter's boast, ***“Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”*** But He also heard the rooster crow after Peter had denied him three times. He heard Judas saying, ***“Hail, Master,”*** as he kissed Jesus in a signal to betray him. And now instead of crowds shouting ***“Hosanna!”*** Jesus' ears hear another crowd crying, ***“Crucify him, crucify him!”***

The ears of Christ heard all the pleas for mercy and all the curses and insults directed to Him. But the ears of Christ did not need the approval of people for Jesus to remain obedient to the Father. Because the ears of Christ were tuned to hear God always.

At His baptism those ears heard the voice of the Father saying, “*This is my beloved son with whom I am pleased,*” and again at His transfiguration those ears heard the voice of the Father add, “. . . *listen to him.*” The ears of Christ did not need the accolades and compliments of people to give him power and perseverance. Instead the ears of Christ had to hear the words of the Father often, to gain strength to meet all the cries, the sighs and the “whys.”

But the ears of Christ finally had to hear silence — even from God. He cried out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” Finally the ears of Christ became deaf to all sounds. They could not even hear the silence of the tomb in which he lay. He suffered the deafness of death which our sins had thrust upon Him.

In the various paths of our lives, our ears too will hear much. Some we will long to hear: the voice of a child, the soothing sound of the beloved’s words, the music of birds singing on a new spring day. Some we will want to shut out the noise: the sharp cacophony of pent up rage expressed through auto horns; the discord of voices in heated argument; the petulant sounds of tantrums.

We will, as did our Lord, find our ears receive their share of accolades and assaults, caring and carping, encouragement and envy, bile and blessing . . . and silence — sometimes hideous when we long for companionship restored; oftentimes welcomed as respite against the din.

We learn from our Lord two things: It is important that we listen — first to God and then to those around us. Listen first to God so that He can remind you who and whose you are, so that He can tell you His unending love and forgiveness. Then listen to others, because they need someone to hear with compassion the turmoil and hurt, the ecstasy and energy of their lives.

Listen for the sounds that the ears of Christ heard. Then your ears can be truly opened and your tongue can be loosened. Then we will hear the absolute and complete love of God in Jesus Christ. And we can speak

again true praise and worship of God, speak to share this love with others.

The Christ who used his ears to hear is now alive forevermore, and speaks His saving word to us: “LET ANYONE WHO HAS EARS HEAR!”
Amen.