

LISTENING TO JESUS: 2ND SUNDAY OF LENT (A)

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St Augustine is one of the most famous saints of the Church. Early in his life he felt drawn to the person of Jesus Christ and to the Christian way of life. But for a long time both lust and pride got in the way of his taking the plunge and getting baptised. Eventually, however, both he and his fifteen year old son, born out of marriage but named *Adeodatus* (meaning *Gift of God*), were baptised together in the Church of Milan. This happened April 25th, 387.

Augustine has recorded in his memoirs called the *Confessions* two religious experiences which transformed his attitudes and his whole way of life. One has to do with a text from the bible, the other with music.

In the first incident, Augustine has thrown himself under a fig tree. He is depressed to the point of tears at the remembrance of his sins. He asks God how much longer can God put up with him. Then suddenly from a house near by, he hears the voice of a child calling out over and over again, '*Tolle, lege! Take it up, read it! Take it up, read it!*' Immediately Augustine stops crying, his whole face lights up, and he goes to the bible to take and read the first words he finds there. On opening the book his eyes fall on these words of St Paul: '*Let us conduct ourselves properly, as people who live in the light of day - no orgies or drunkenness, no immorality or indecency, no fighting or jealousy. But take up the weapons of the Lord Jesus Christ, and stop paying attention to your sinful nature and satisfying its desires*' (Letter to the Romans 13:12-13). The message is overpowering. He can resist the Lord no longer.

Some time later his determination to live as a Christian is reinforced by a second experience. This time it's the singing of the Christians in the church at Milan. He remembers the deep impression the singing made on him. He says to God in his memoirs: '*I wept at the beauty of your hymns and canticles, and was powerfully moved at the sweet sound of your [people] singing. These sounds flowed into my ears and truth streamed into my heart.*' Through the grace of God coming to Augustine in those two experiences, he was changed, transformed, transfigured. He became a new person, and later a priest, bishop, and writer. On a wall of his house he had the following sentence written in large letters: '*Here we do not speak evil of anyone.*'

It's obvious from the gospels that people around Jesus expected him to change all kinds of situations. So they brought him their sick, their crippled, their mentally disturbed, their children, and their other worries. He healed some. He comforted and supported others. But as a general rule Jesus did not usher in an age of instant, total, and permanent change of situations. The grass did not grow any greener. The trees did not grow bigger fruits. The wheat in the fields did not yield bigger crops. The rain did not fall more abundantly. The sun did not shine any brighter. And not every sick person he met went home feeling better.

But some changes did occur, changes in people themselves, including the changes that came over Jesus himself first of all. There on the top of the mountain he begins to shine like the sun with the splendour and glory of God. In his new condition, he receives encouragement

from those great spokespersons for God, Moses and Elijah. In effect they tell him: *'Keep up the good work. keep going. Persevere with your mission. Even if it leads to the agony of the cross, it will end in glory, the glory you are now experiencing.'*

Change comes over the friends of Jesus, Peter, James and John as well, who have seen the change in Jesus and who are awe-struck, puzzled and perplexed by it. The change that happens to them is deepened when they hear God speaking to them in the voice from the cloud: *'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him!'* So God is saying to them: *'Do what he tells you. Live his teachings.'* From that moment those first friends of Jesus see him in a new light. They take him more seriously as messenger of God and saviour. They also understand that a new world, a better world, must start with them, must start with their heeding that message of God they hear: *'Listen to Jesus!'*

'Listen to Jesus!' There's a message for you and me too. Is there, e.g. someone right now who is driving us crazy? Is there someone we are fighting? Is there some group we are experiencing in a negative way? How would Jesus see them? How does Jesus see them? What would Jesus do? What words of his can help? What do we hear him saying to us?

Listen to Jesus! Can we do that especially during our holy communion today, when he visits us as our light, our strength, our help, coming to change us for the better? Only if we change and become better people can we hope to rise with him to a new, transformed and glorious life. In our holy communion with him today, then, may he influence us to overcome all fear and indifference, all selfishness and laziness, all harshness and hardness of heart, to overcome anything and everything, in fact, that may be stopping us from walking with him along the road to Jerusalem and listening to him along the way!