

25. September 2023

Attentive listening to the Word of God

Lk 8:16-18

'No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed. No, it is put on a lamp-stand so that people may see the light when they come in. For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be made known and brought to light. So take care how you listen; anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has.'

"Take care how you listen", the Lord tells us in today's Gospel. What a profound and important phrase! Many times we only listen half-heartedly when essential things are being said, or we hear only what we want to hear. Think how easily we get distracted or even fall asleep during a sermon! Certainly boredom is not the only reason why this happens to us?

In writing the Rule for his monks, St. Benedict uses a memorable phrase: "Listen attentively, my son, to the words of the Master."

"Listen attentively" means opening one's whole heart and spirit to God, longing for His Word, asking Him to instruct us, and trying to understand and fulfil every wish He conveys to us.

"Attentive listening" is a matter of awakened love, which focuses all the senses, all the heart and all the spirit on God.

Attentive listening also means learning to live in true inner freedom. In fact, if our soul is under the influence of very strong and negative emotions, we will not be able to really listen. The same is true if we suffer from complexes of any kind, for in this case we are also not free enough to accept what the Lord is trying to tell us. This also applies when we are locked up in our own desires and illusions. In all these circumstances, it will be difficult for us to properly understand the Word of the Lord and to overcome our inner bondage to let it in.

To truly understand the Lord, then, requires the ear of a disciple (cf. Isa 50:4b-5), as well as a growing inner freedom, so that there are no obstacles to the acceptance of the Word of God. On a serious path of following Christ, we can acquire both requirements. A prayer that could help us is the following: “Lord, open my ears so that I may hear”; and also this one: “Free me from all bondage and lack of freedom, so that I may receive your Word”.

If we notice within ourselves these lacks of freedom, which is already an important step, we should place them before the Lord. In this way, we put into practice this apt prayer of St. Nicholas of Flue: “My Lord and my God, save me from all that distances me from You”.

We can relate what has been said so far to the last sentence of today's Gospel, *“For anyone who has, will be given more; anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has.”*

If we do not accept God's Word correctly within us, it will not be able to transform us inwardly. His Word becomes our spiritual possession only when we internalise it and govern ourselves according to it. Otherwise, we may know the Word of God and even quote it, but it will not become the permanent source of life for us (cf. Jn 4:14). The opposite can even happen... If our life drifts away from the truth of the word, it may happen that even the remembrance of it is more and more erased from our memory. In this way the Word that the Lord tells us today is fulfilled: *“anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he thinks he has”*.

It is therefore all the more important to accept this warning of the Lord, and to illuminate our spiritual life by attentive interiorisation of His Word, so that His light shines in our life, and all who come into contact with it praise God.