

LAST SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY, THE TRANSFIGURATION, YEAR A, FEBRUARY 19, 2023

How many of you are familiar with the TV show “The Voice”? It is a talent competition for singers who audition for four judges who then choose them and coach them along. Like most reality TV shows the winner is chosen through voting by the viewers. What is interesting about “The Voice” is that when the person auditions in front of the judges the judges have their backs turned to them. This way the judges are just listening to the voices of the contestants and are not swayed by their looks, race or any other factors that might influence them. Actually, this is very similar to the way prestigious orchestras audition musicians by listening to them while they are obscured by a curtain so they cannot even know the person’s gender. In the case of this reality show the judges listen strictly to the voice.

When you think about it listening to voices is very much the ultimate power in our 21st century. What I mean by that is voice power is very much the driving force in electronic developments. Every new successful emerging technology has at its center voice power.

How many of you have an iPhone or an Android or voice activated GPS in your car? How many of you use Siri on your iPhone or Google on your android? Siri or Google are voices on your cell phones that answers your inquiries and tells you where to find things like restaurants, places of interest, or directions, etc. By the way I heard the name Siri is Norwegian which means beautiful woman who will lead you to victory. I don’t know if she will lead you to victory but Siri is a voice, as is Google, we rely on to help us get where or what we want.

Many of us also have Alexa devices in our home that are voice activated. You can turn on and off the tv or lights, set timers, play music etc just by using your voice. It’s amazing isn’t it? But it doesn’t stop there. Even smart appliances like refrigerators, stoves and washing machines can also interact with you and tell you how much longer till your clothes are dry or if your food is ready yet. All of this is controlled by your voice. Are there glitches? Yes. I’ve been on the phone with a friend in North Carolina and had her on speaker when she told her Alexa to start a timer and my Alexa responded. But the strangest thing happened just a week ago when I was on the phone with my daughter and I heard another phone ringing and I realized the phone was ringing through my Alexa and a friend answered and when I responded quite surprised he said, you called me, what’s up? I have no idea how that happened that a phone call went through my Alexa.

What all this says is that not only is our voice quite powerful today but other technological voices as well. In today’s Gospel we have the Transfiguration story that commemorates when Jesus was “affirmed” as the Son of God, on a mountaintop, in front of a few specially selected witnesses. We could also say it is a day to accept and embrace the power of The Voice. At Jesus’ baptism The Voice of God came down and declared that, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” or, in a better translation, “This is my beloved Son, who brings me great pleasure.” That affirmation was declared once again on the mountaintop where Jesus had gone with Peter and James and John. For those disciples, it was their first experience of what we could call “voice activated” faith.

After the experience on the mountain, the voice of God tells the disciples to "listen to Jesus". Discipleship is nothing more or less than "listening to Jesus." To move forward in faith is to listen to Him, to recognize His voice, THE voice that is a transfiguring power. Jesus is the voice that transfigures the ungrateful to being generous, that heals the broken-hearted and makes the wounded whole human beings again. The voice of God in Jesus is the voice of change, of transfiguration.

So, the question we need to ask ourselves is this: Given the power of our own voice and the power of other voices can you hear the voice of Jesus in your life? Can we hear the voice of Jesus in our culture? Or do we have a hearing problem? Can we hear the voice of Jesus over the drone of voices calling us elsewhere? The truth is listening for Jesus voice is "serious" business. To "Listen to Him" we need to do a few things which are to mute other voices; to learn to listen and be silent; and to learn how to recognize the voice of Jesus.

As I've said, we humans are bombarded by lots of other "voices. We need to ask ourselves is the voice of God even in the range of our frequencies? Do we take the time to tune God into our lives? Or do we care more for the voices in our digital life that can isolate us, make us fearful rather than the "real" and "true" voice of Jesus that calls us into true humanness and relationships?

We often forget that to listen for God's voice is not a passive action. We live in a world where voice-activation living is commonplace. Remember I mentioned Siri as becoming our answer to everything in life. If we don't know how to do something, don't know how to handle something, don't know where to go? We ask Siri. In a way Siri exists to serve all our needs. Unfortunately, I think this is the way we approach God too often. We think God is at our beck and call and that our prayers should be answered just the way we want things to go. A lot of people today think that prayer is a matter of "asking" Jesus/Siri to solve our problems, tweak our lives, answer all our questions, make life easy.

But discipleship with Jesus has never promised a God-serves-you, easy-does-it life. Siri may be our personal assistant, but Jesus is not. We serve Jesus, not the other way around. That means we need to "listen to Him." Jesus is not our knowledge navigator, but our wisdom navigator, the navigator of our soul. To have faith in Jesus is trusting the Spirit and sometimes that means to just be quiet and surrender to the mysterious.

In fact, being silent is the heart of listening. And that's our problem: to be silent requires trust, patience, surrender of control, not talking over everyone so you can't hear what they're saying and not always getting what you want. It requires not commanding or coordinating the voices around you, but surrendering to the sounds of silence. How much silence do you have in your day? Does being in silence unnerve you? Do you want more of God in your life? Then we have to learn when to shut up and listen.

We need to stop and really listen so we can recognize The voice of God in order that we can expand our understanding of who God calls us to be and do. There is the story which I know I have told before of two men walking down a busy street at lunch time and one stops and says do you hear that cricket. The other is astonished that the other could actually hear a cricket and asks "how can you hear it over the noise of the people and cars?" With that the other man drops a coin and watches people stop and scurry around looking for the coin. The man replies "it's all in what you're listening for".

We are all called to a voice-activated faith. We are called to listen for the voice of God in all the competing voices and sounds around us. Today the voices we hear may

not be declaring, "This is my Son," but they are declaring "these are my children, my sons and daughters." The voices we are now hearing may be declaring, "I need help." Or "my children and I are sleeping in our car." Those are all voice-activated calls to faith that demand a faith response. Can we keep our ears "tuned" to these needs that are everywhere in the world? Can we listen for them? For that's what discipleship is. It is being less selfish and more generous than we used to be; less judgmental and more tolerant, less anxious and more trusting, doing fewer bad things and more good things. Listen for and to the voice that tells us we are God's beloved children and we too will be transfigured to become the voice bearers of God's good news. Amen.