

A father comes home after a hard day at work.
He is greeted at the door by his four-year old son
who jumps into his father's open arms,
almost knocking his dad to the floor before he can regain his balance.

The boy then begins to tell his daddy all that happened that day.
The song he learned at pre-school,
The band-aid on his knee from when he fell on his bike.
The plot line of the cartoon he had just been watching.
The story of his day comes spilling out in one event after the other.

And then it happened.
It's not that the father interrupted his son's daily report
by speaking or walking away mid-sentence.
But somehow the child realized that dad was not paying attention
His father's mind had wandered away from the conversation;
Maybe he was thinking of something that happened back at the office,
or to the things he needed to do around the house that night.
Even though the dad never left the room physically,
he had momentarily checked out mentally.
And the boy could sense it.
So the child took matters into his own hands, literally.
He placed one of his little hands on each side of his father's face,
squeezed his dad's cheeks together and said,
"DADDY, LISTEN TO ME!"

And the boy is right.
Just because someone is not talking while you are talking to them,
does not mean they are actually listening to you.
They may just be thinking about what they are going to say next.
Or they may be nodding their head,
even uttering an occasional "*uh huh, um, I see what you mean.*"
Some of you just now are elbowing your spouse,
and they are looking back at you with a confused look.
They probably they do not know why you nudged them,
because their mind drifts when I talk too.

Listening. Real listening happens all too rarely.

So much so that when it does, when someone really listens to you,
you realize what a special gift it is.

In our Gospel reading today, God has grabbed each side of our face,
And he is holding on, looking us straight in the eye,
and saying, "This is my beloved son, Listen to Him."

Jesus had just revealed to his disciples for the first time
that his life of obedience to God

would lead him the suffering and death on a cross.

Now this is not what the disciples wanted to hear

and so rather than listen to this difficult message,

they tried to argue with Jesus and change his mind.

But that was not the response Jesus needed.

Not at that point.

He could already feel the agonizing weight of the cross.

What Jesus needed was not someone to argue with him,

But someone to listen to him.

So he took a mini-retreat, headed up a mountain to pray,
seeking the comfort of a listening ear.

There he was joined by Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets,
heroes of Israel's past who themselves understood
the path of obedience sometimes lead to suffering.

And on that mountaintop, God himself listened to his beloved son.

And in that listening Jesus found the strength to come back down
and fulfill his difficult mission.

Perhaps that is the lesson for us;

even when no one else seems to be listening to our deepest fears,

even when no one else seems to hear our darkest cry,

we are invited to turn to the scriptures,

to find companionship in the heroes of our faith.

We are invited today to retreat to a quiet place before God

and pour out your heart.

Isn't the season of Lent a good time to have that heart to heart with God?

Go ahead. God is listening.

Now I could have ended my homily right there.
And some of you may have wished I had.
But frankly, God did not intend to let the disciples,
nor any of the rest of us,
off the hook when it comes to cultivating this gift of listening.
It is not just God's job to listen.
Each of us are supposed to learn that grace too.

When the disciples started fumbling for words and gestures
in the face of the awesome shining moment before them,
God thundered this one simple command,
"This is my beloved Son. LISTEN TO HIM!"

You can almost sense God seeking our undivided attention.

Sometimes it is the gift God most wants to receive,
Sometimes it is the gift we most need to give.

To simply Listen.
To listen to God.
To listen to others.
To just listen.