

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

**If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

This is the response for this weekend's Psalm (Psalm 95). It is a call to pay close attention to the voice of God. I can almost hear the longing in God's Heart as He calls out, "*I love you! Please hear me.*" There are really two parts of this response: 1) that we are to listen for the voice of God; and 2) that we are not to harden ourselves against it.

The Bible and the Catholic Church assume that we *do* hear the voice of God. Here's the truth: God speaks to us. This is why I have encouraged the use of Mass journals – I believe God has something to say to us and we *can* hear Him! He speaks to us through the Church, through the Scriptures, through the Mass, through nature, through music, through other people, and in many other ways. Sometimes God speaks to us with an audible voice, but many times it is in the quiet of our hearts.

Note that I said, in the *quiet* of our hearts. Noise and distraction are the enemy to prayer. The world is shouting at us, God whispers. He does *really* speak to us, but we have to listen for His voice. If we surround ourselves with constant noise – external or internal – we will not be able to hear His gentle whisper. Think about how you spend your time... do you ever allow yourself a quiet moment? Now that we have the internet literally in the palm of our hands, we rarely take the time just to *be*. When we are in the waiting room, when we're stuck in traffic, when we are going about our day and have a moment to spare, is our first reaction to get on our phones, or to take a moment to be with God? He wants to be with us. Do we give Him any time in our day dedicated just to Him? I encourage you to enjoy moments of silence with God. I encourage you to dedicate time every day to silence with God. When it becomes a habit, it becomes easy and something you enjoy.

An incredibly powerful place to hear the voice of God is in His sacramental Presence. The Eucharist is available for adoration all day, every day in our Eucharistic Chapel. We have special times of Exposition (when our Lord is displayed in the Monstrance for our love, adoration and worship) on Wednesdays from 8:30-9:30am and 2:00-8:00pm. Come. Stop in. Spend a few quiet minutes with Jesus. It will change your life.

The second part of the Psalm response is that we can **harden** ourselves to God's voice. We may hear God speaking to us through the Scriptures, but then reject it. We may hear God calling us to greater holiness, but prefer the "easy way." We may know that the Church teaches something (for instance, the Church's teaching on contraception, abortion, or other moral issues), but because we don't like it, we reject it. It's not when we find the voice of God easy to follow that we're faithful; it's when the teaching is difficult that fidelity is tested.

We have to remember, though, when God speaks to us it is always, *always, always* a voice of love! God loves us so much! He sees the mess we're in and He wants to draw us out. When we harden our hearts to God's voice, we reject His love, His healing balm, His mercy. Oh, and how that hurts the Heart of God when we reject His mercy!

I think about the story I tell at (almost) every Baptism. Little Emily was four years old when she went to the Dollar Store and saw a beautiful pearl necklace that she desperately wanted. True, they weren't real pearls, they were plastic, but she still loved her "pearls" more than anything else in the whole world. One night, her daddy came in to tuck her in and asked her, "Emily, will you give me your pearls." In shock, Emily responded, "Uh... uh... I love you Daddy, and you can have my teddy bear, but you can't have my pearls." Her daddy tucked her in, kissed her and said, "I love you, Emily, even though you won't give me your pearls."

The next night, her daddy came in again and asked, "Emily, will you give me your pearls." Emily replied, "You can have my doll, but you can't have my pearls." Her daddy tucked her in, kissed her and said, "I love you, Emily, even though you won't give me your pearls."

On the third night, her daddy came into the room to find Emily sobbing. He ran and put his arm around her, and through her tears, Emily said, "Daddy, here are my pearls." He took the pearls away, and then reached into his pocket and pulled out a black velvet case and handed it to her. When she opened it, inside she found a real pearl necklace.

You see, God's voice, while it may sometimes sound to us that He is asking for something we love – maybe everything we love – He only wants to take away the plastic to give us the real pearl of great price! His voice brings a message of love, peace, joy and fulfillment.

May we not harden ourselves to the voice of God, but listen carefully for His voice, and soften our hearts!