

Homily for the Temporal Profession of Brother Damian
September 6, 2009 (23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, B)
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“Listen, my son, to the teaching of the master and incline the ear of your heart. Accept readily the admonition of the good father and fulfill it in action.”

This, dear sisters and brothers, is the way the Rule of Saint Benedict begins, which he wrote one thousand five hundred years ago and which we Benedictines observe even today. It's up to date also in our time!

“To listen,” is a basic word of the Rule. It occurs thirteen times in just the Prologue. It's also a basic word of Holy Scripture. There it occurs two hundred and ninety-seven times. Everything begins with listening. All creation came into being through listening: “God spoke, let there be...and it came into being.” “He called and they were created,” so we read in a Psalm (Ps 148:5). It is the essence of the created *to be* God's call, to be God's call turned into response. “And God saw that everything was good.”

In order for someone to become a monk, he needs to listen. He needs to know how to listen carefully, and to open the ear of his heart. Benedict invites us to hear even with the ear of the heart. Listening with the ear of the heart – this is a very deep kind of listening. It's listening using the heart's power to love. Such listening affects a belonging. The Latin word in the Rule that we translate into English as “to listen,” *audire*, is related to the word *obedire*, which means “to obey.” Listening becomes obedience out of love and become discipleship.

Today in our Sunday gospel we meet a person who can't hear anymore, one who is deaf, whose ears aren't open. People bring this deaf man to Jesus. Even though he can't hear, there's a deep longing within him to be healed and to be able to hear. This man gets into contact with Jesus. He takes him aside. Jesus touches the man and he allows himself to be touched. He puts his fingers into his ears and then touches the man's tongue with his spittle. A person could almost say he become one with him through his touch. He touches him in this intimate way. Then he looks up to heaven and gets into contact with God his Father. He sighs – it is rare that the gospels tell us about Jesus' emotions. Here he sighs, as though he wanted to say: “Oh Father, why are the people so deaf toward your word? Why are they so mute and closed toward your love, even though you've made everything so well?” Then he says “Ephphatha – Be opened!” At once his ears are opened and the ligament of his tongue is loosened, and he is free.

Dear Brother Damian,

You chose very intentionally for yourself the name of Saint Damian, who was a doctor and healer. You are very aware that you yourself need healing time and again. You know the longing to be healed, healed from your deafness and muteness, from your blindness and paralysis. You know the longing to be set free from the demons who want to bind you. You have experienced the touch of Jesus. You have heard his voice with the ear of your heart. That's why you entered the monastery, that's why you want to pronounce your monastic vows today. In a moment you will lift your arms and sing, “*Suscipe me, Domine, secundum eloquium tuum et vivam* – Receive me, Lord, according to your promise, and I will live.” In this posture hold out to God all your wounds, your whole longing for life and aliveness, and he will heal you.

Dear sisters and brothers,

Isn't there a longing for healing within all of us, for the healing of wounds in body and soul? This celebration is meant to encourage all of us to trust in God, as it is said in the reading from the prophet Isaiah: “Courage, do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming...he is coming to save you.” Thus, we too can only marvel time and again and say: “Yes, he has done all things well.”

Amen.