I. Introduction

If we were to take a survey to find out what important things many people don’t do very well, I’m sure one of the things high on that list would be listening. Many times people have trouble paying attention. There’s a story about two men who were talking. The first said, “My wife talks to herself a lot.” The second man answered, “So does mine, but she doesn’t realize it—she thinks I’m listening.” There was also an airline flight attendant who became fed up with passengers ignoring her when she gave safety instructions before takeoff, so one time she said, “If the oxygen mask drops down in front of you, place it over your navel and continue breathing normally.” Not one passenger noticed (James Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited, pp. 318-319).

When I was in the seminary we had a morning prayer service and an evening prayer service in the chapel each day, and part of the ceremony involved a cantor singing various intercessions, to which all of us would sing in response, “Lord, hear our prayer.” One of the cantors insisted no one ever really listened to what was being sung, and he claimed that if he sang something unusual like “That great gobs of molasses would fall from the ceiling, let us pray to the Lord,” everyone would automatically respond “Lord, hear our prayer” without missing a beat. I like to think that some of us would have noticed, but he may have been right.

It’s a common habit to give a speaker less than our full attention. Sometimes there are good reasons for this, and many times we can more or less get away with it in our relationships with other people. This is not true, however, in our relationship with God. In order to respond to God’s word, we have to hear it. If we are truly to follow Jesus, we must first of all listen to Him.

II. Development

Today’s Gospel tells the story of Our Lord’s transfiguration: for a brief moment, His divine glory shone through His human body. Peter, James, and John already knew their Master was truly human; here they saw that Jesus was also truly divine. These three apostles were given the privilege of this special vision to strengthen their faith for the difficult times ahead. The key words of this passage are spoken by God the Father: “This is My Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” We must listen to Jesus—especially when He says difficult things like “love your enemies, pray for your persecutors, forgive one another from your hearts, do not judge others,” and “take up your cross each day.” Anyone can claim to follow Jesus—and many people do, in the sense of calling themselves Christians. However, true followers of Christ pay attention to Him and try to live as He asks. In our weakness and sinfulness, we often fall short—but as long as we’re trying sincerely, He is pleased to claim us as His own.
III. Conclusion

In the days of the Old West an Army captain was sent as the new commander of a fort on the frontier. One of his first acts was to meet with the chief of an important local native American tribe, and, with the help of a translator, he asked many questions and made several suggestions. To the captain’s surprise, however, the chief made no reply to anything he said. After the meeting, the captain asked the translator why this had happened, and the man explained, “That’s what we call Indian time. He has enough respect for your questions to go away and think about them before answering them” (Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, p. 223). Maybe we might use these weeks of Lent as an opportunity to spend more time listening to and thinking about whatever God may be saying or asking of us, instead of quickly responding in a routine or unthinking manner; maybe we might try to show the Lord more respect by taking the time to slow down and be quiet and attentive in His presence on a more regular basis. If we do, we might be very surprised and pleased with the results.

There’s no denying that listening to Jesus isn’t always easy; sometimes we have to make a special effort to tune out distractions, and quite often we’ll find His words and teachings difficult or challenging. That, however, is what discipleship is all about. In the 2nd Reading St. Paul urges us, “Bear your share of hardship for the Gospel.” What is your share? Perhaps it’s having a family member who doesn’t take religion seriously—and you might be worried or upset about this. Maybe at work or school you see others bending or mocking the rules, and getting away with it—and your honesty seems to put you at a competitive disadvantage. Perhaps your efforts to instill moral values in your children leads to some grumbling or complaining on their part; maybe your efforts to live out your faith cause others to consider you foolish or out-of-touch. There are probably days when all of us wonder “What’s the use?,” or feel like giving up—yet we continue. These are all ways in which we carry our cross and bear our share of the hardship the Gospel involves; these are all ways we show we’ve truly been listening to Jesus.

In the 1st Reading God told Abram—whose name was later lengthened to Abraham—to take the unimaginably radical step of leaving his homeland and traveling to a new and distant land where he knew no one, promising that there he would become the father of a great nation—even though he was already 75 years old. This may have been hard for Abraham to understand or accept—but he listened, believed, and obeyed. We too must listen and respond in faith. In this way God will be able to do great things in our lives, and in this way we, like the apostles, will come to share in Jesus’ glory.