September 8th The Shofar Deafness

Hearing God's word is essential

Jesus often ended his teachings with the somewhat mysterious instruction, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" What did our Lord mean by implying some had "ears to hear" and some didn't? It seems he meant some could hear spiritually—were open to spiritual truth—while the ears of others were closed to his words.

In contrast to physical deafness, which is not something we can help, spiritual hearing loss is self-inflicted and can be life-threatening, since the soul lives "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

Our Spiritual Ears Are Connected to our Heart

The "heart" is the deepest self, the interior person. The prime "mover" of the heart is the will, acting like a rudder that can steer us toward truth or away from it. The more our will seeks God's will, the more readily we will hear, and welcome, the truth. But if disordered desires and fears hinder it, the will can become an obstacle to our receiving truth. Such desires, set as they are on something other than God's will, are the cause of much spiritual hearing loss.

How does it work in practice? Imagine what would happen if a certain truth calls into question something I want very much or challenges me to do something I fear. To accept the truth might mean losing the very thing I've set my heart on (or encountering what I fear). Rather than face this possibility, I might choose to fend off the truth to protect myself, keeping my world and my hopes intact.

Many "heart" problems lie undetected. Before we know it, we come up with many good reasons why we needn't—or shouldn't—listen to what is being presented by the Scriptures in the Church.

This prospect is a little frightening, since we all contend with potentially deafening desires and attachments. Thomas More called these our "fond fantasies." Self-deception can be defeated only as

Pride and Prejudice

When it comes to spiritual hearing loss, pride and prejudice go together like a set of earplugs. This attitude could be summed up with the words, "I already know better." Pride and prejudice cause us to cling to our preconceived notions. We don't want to consider other positions, even when presented with the most tantalizing evidence.

The Pharisees were a prime example of this type of deafness. They were sure Jesus couldn't be the Messiah, because the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, and Jesus was from Galilee (cf. John 7:52). Did they ever ask him where he was born? No. They already knew they were right, and Jesus wasn't their idea of a deliverer, anyway. Wilfully ignoring the evidence, they missed the Messiah.

The "pride" portion of pride and prejudice comes into play when a message is rejected because the messenger is looked down upon. This attitude can be summed up with the words, "Who are *you*to tell *me*?" The Pharisees just about said as much to the blind man our Lord healed (cf. John 9:34). They rejected the message of John the Baptist for the same reason, and Scripture says "by refusing baptism from him, the Pharisees and the lawyers had thwarted what God had in mind for them" (Luke 7:30). And don't forget the town of Nazareth, whose attitude toward Jesus was, "Who does he think he is?" (cf. Matt.13:53–58).

We may wear the earplugs of pride and prejudice only when certain topics are brought up or when particular people speak. In my Protestant days, I had a set that I inserted whenever I encountered anything overly Catholic. Since I'd held onto those plugs more out of ignorance than malice, our Lord mercifully removed them, opening my ears to unimagined wonders.

Don't want to listen? Why? What's wrong with the messenger? He's too young? Too old? Too familiar? He's Catholic? Are we saying, "I

already know I have nothing to learn from him?" Then we're wearing the earplugs of pride and prejudice—one in each ear.

The Soundproof Booth

The single and most stubborn of all causes of spiritual hearing impairment: subjective truth. It works like this. We begin by doing away with objective truth all together. "Truth" becomes whatever we believe it to be. Make up God according to our design. Feel free to vary his laws to suit our own preferences. A sin? What's that? Who's to say?

And therein lies the attraction—and deception—of subjective truth. It leads people to believe they can change the spiritual world simply by changing their minds. Preferring a "reality" they can invent, they have little desire to hear about an objective truth to which they must conform. Scripture predicted this phenomenon: *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths* (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Having one's own spiritual dream world is appealing on many levels. In our culture, the popularity of subjective "truth" has increased as moral standards have declined. Custom-made truth often tells us sexual immorality is love and that God will accept it because he's a God of mercy. As for God's mercy, if we believe we are doing nothing wrong, why do we need his mercy? And if we admit our behaviour is wrong, how can we continue in it and even justify it? Mercy is for those who are willing to repent.

Such inconsistencies abound in the world of individualized "truth." In fact, when examined closely, the whole notion of subjective truth begins to look like the emperor's new clothes—a kind of spiritual craziness that enjoys being out of touch with reality.

The phrase itself—" subjective truth"—is an oxymoron. Truth cannot be changed on a whim, from person to person, or even with the times. Spiritual truth describes God and spiritual things not as you see them or I see them but *as they really are*.

We reach new heights of spiritual insanity when we try to combine subjective truth with Christianity, which many today are attempting to do. Jesus is the Truth, objectively, in Person (cf. John 14:6). He is real. We cannot remake him in our own image. If we attempt do so, we are believing in "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4), not the real Son of God, and our Savior becomes a figment of our imagination.

Christianity declares God *has* spoken: *In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son* (Heb.1:1–2). The Incarnation is all about God speaking to us. He sent us his living Word: *This is my beloved Son . . . listen to him*"(Matt. 17:5).

Our Lord went to great lengths to give us truth and to ensure it would be handed on intact until his return. He established a Church that he said would always be guided by the Spirit of truth (John 14:16–17, 16:13). He put apostles in charge of his Church, giving them gifts to govern and teach in his name, saying, "He who hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16). And, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). To say we can't know the words of Christ—i.e., the truth—is to accuse our Lord of grave injustice, for in the end we will be judged by whether or not we have kept these words (cf. John 12:47–50).

Here we have hit upon the answer to the question, "Who has ears to hear?" Those who honestly want the truth will "hear" it. They will recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd, distinguishing it from all merely human "voices" (cf. John 10), precisely because they are willing to do what he says. They want to follow his way, so they are attentive to him. "If any man's will is to do [God's] will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God" (John 7:17).

Those who prefer to follow their own philosophies, on the other hand, will continue to find a welcome hiding place from truth in the world, in their prejudices, and most securely in the sound-proof booth of subjectivism.