

## *Fifteenth Sunday of Year A – The Power of God’s Word*

We are all familiar with the experience of someone speaking just a few words to us and those words having an impact upon us, maybe staying with us for many years – perhaps even lifelong.

It is not that the words were shouted at us with any violence, or that they were unusual or new words – just that they seemed to have an immediacy and a relevance to us.

These words may have been spoken by someone close to us – someone whom we loved: a parent, partner, or friend. Or they may have been spoken by someone whose authority we respected and to whom we gave our fullest attention. Or they may have been uttered by a complete stranger, someone who, on a journey perhaps, shared their thoughts with us or made some passing remark.

However the word came to us we know that we have been affected by it. The words had ‘power’. Because of them we *thought* a little differently, our *hearts opened* more widely, the way we *acted* changed somewhat.

In today’s first reading from the Book of Isaiah the prophet tells us that the Word of God is *always* a word of ‘power’. When God speaks to us he speaks to our heart of hearts – the words of God are always relevant and effective: ‘*They achieve what they were sent to do*’. They stay with us and bear fruit in our lives.

How does God speak to us? One way is by whispering in the depths of our inner self where we weigh our motives and make our choices. God speaks in the ‘voice of conscience’ where we sense what is expected of us in this moment and when we perceive developing patterns in our life of good or evil. As God murmurs the truth we are brought face to face with ourselves.

We can respond rightly, or we can, like Adam, seek to hide when we hear God’s voice in our garden. Everyone knows this sound of truth in the heart: it rings like a bell. But we can run from its peal, its ‘appeal’, stop our ears, muffle its sound. The Word comes but we can resist its message.

Sometimes God speaks to us with the voices of the natural world – in the sound of the wind, or the waves, in the song of the birds, in the babbling of a brook, in the static immensity of a mountain, in the marvellous abundance of plant life, or in the wide ranging activity of the animal kingdom.

God speaks to us sometimes in those memorable words of parent, teacher, friend or stranger which carried their striking and lasting truth.

God lived in all those words, bringing divine love to bear upon us, within us. God's grace gave those words their special immediacy, and pertinence. It was good for us to hear them: these seeds of truth sown in our lives.

If we responded to their promptings, their directive, their challenge, then we would have grown a little as persons. Yet, knowing their truth within ourselves, we could harden ourselves against that, or allow their wisdom to be drowned out by the clamouring din of other voices in our ears which were easier for us to follow: less demanding.

In the Scriptures themselves God speaks to us: not in an ancient, dusty writing, but in a *living word* of power. If we read or listen to the word of God proclaimed in church or chapel carefully; if we give that word our prayerful attention; if we are **alert** to the word, for the phrase which is to touch our life today, then we can, most profoundly, develop our own individuality and enter into union with our fellow creatures. The words of Scripture call forth our own life, and bind our lives together. By letting these words sink deeply into the soil of our hearts we come more alive.

Lastly, God speaks to us in life of Jesus, in the Word made flesh; not only in the happenings of the Gospel events long ago but in his sacramental action now. The Risen Lord comes to us in our Liturgies just as surely as he came to His Apostles on Easter Sunday. Jesus will lift us into the fullness of life that He enjoys. Our prayer should be that we will respond to the warmth of His love as a seed responds to the warmth and light of the sun and the rains of springtime:

*In the earth a small seed is hidden, and lies unseen until it is bidden  
by springtime stirrings up to the sunlight and summer ripening.*

*In me, O my Lord, plant the seed of love, nourished by your body and by your blood  
May my soul take wings and rise upwards to new awakenings. (Estelle White).*

‘Speak Lord, your servant is listening, you have the message of eternal life’  
(Alleluia verse).

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