

O that today you would listen to his voice. Harden not your hearts. Words from our psalm for today. These words have been haunting me this week, as I have been thinking about this homily, I keep coming back to them. It is a very well known psalm, which we sing a number of times during the three year cycle of readings, so some of us know it very well. Priests, deacons and those who pray the divine office know it very well too, because it is the psalm that begins the prayer of the church each day. Each day, before we face the world, with its troubles, trials and temptations, we need a reminder. We need to be reminded to listen, not to harden our hearts to the voice of God.

A heart, if it is to remain beating and life-giving, must not become hardened, cold, and stoney by time spent in the world; it must remain a heart seeking God, a heart in communion with God. Our modern world does not help, with all its demands and pressures, distractions and divisions.

O that today you would listen to his voice; this is God speaking to us, reminding us that he is there; to whom was he speaking to originally? To his people, whom he called to worship him. He reminds them of the unfaithfulness of their ancestors, who hardened their

hearts against him. How did they harden their hearts? What happened at Meribah, at Massah in the desert?

The names have a meaning - they refer to the people testing God, complaining against God. They are the same place, near Mt Sinai in Egypt, the mountain where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments; so this is the place where the people of Israel, having been led by Moses out of slavery in Egypt, lost faith in God, and started complaining to Moses. They have no water, they are fed up. So they grumble, they refuse to worship God, they even threaten to kill Moses. They hardened their hearts against God. The psalm ends with the words – For forty years, I was wearied of this people, their hearts are astray, these people do not know my ways; then I swore an oath in my anger, never shall they enter my rest.” So this is a warning : if you act like them you will never know my presence.

But even God still saves his people, at Meribah and Massah, he tells Moses, strike the rock with your stick, and water will come out.

So the psalm is a plea from the heart of God; it is really about prayer, worship, praising God, for us, it is about coming to Church, being at Mass regularly, every week;

and God's plea is - don't harden your hearts against me. Don't forget to come to Church. Even if you have problems, still listen to my voice, don't harden your hearts. Come to me, come and worship, with songs and prayers. Come in, bow and bend low, kneel before the God who made you. Only then can you hope to enter into my rest, and know my presence.

We live in a world today where there is still a great temptation to harden our hearts, to ignore the voice of God; there are so many voices that demand our attention – the call of the world to idolise wealth and possessions, the call to pursue our ambitions and success at all costs, the pressure to work flat out in order to achieve our goals, the call to pleasure, popularity, a good image and lifestyle, so loud and persistent are these worldly voices, that the voice of God is easily drowned out; the call of God – come to me, listen to me, worship me with songs of praise is very far down the list of so many people's priorities – every time we forget to come to Church because we think have other things to do instead, that is hardening our hearts against God.

But the warning at the end of the psalm is one we need to pay attention to; these people do not know my ways, they shall never enter my rest. What does that mean for

us? It means that we will never be really happy in life if we ignore the call of God, if we forget about Church and pay more attention to the call of the world. St Augustine, who lived in the fourth century, a great Bishop and father of the Church said "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in you." God made us to know him, to love him and to worship him. If we ignore that fact in, we will never be really satisfied in life, never truly fulfilled, never happy deep down, where it really matters.

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