

The Voice of the Lord and the Voice of the Voiceless

Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord alone! (Deut 6:4)

Timothy Scott, CSB

Jews are commanded to pray this famous text, the “*Shema Israel*” from the Book of Deuteronomy thrice daily, for it expresses their core faith in the one God. Scholars suggest that Jesus’ great prayer in John 17 contains an echo of the “*Shema*” as he prays that all be one, even as he and the Father are one. But I would like to reflect on the verb that begins the prayer, the command to hear.

Attentive Listening

Over two hundred times in the Hebrew bible, the people are instructed to do just that; to hear. It is an ancient way of calling people to attention, to have concern for something that is primary. In the Gospels, this particular kind of attentive hearing is often expressed by a phrase, “Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!” (Mk 4:9.23) Another dramatic example of hearing is found in the Transfiguration, where the voice from heaven speaks to the disciples, “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!” (Mk 9:7)

Hear the Cry of the Poor

Christian discipleship, following the Lord is rooted first and foremost in an active listening. In our personal prayer and in our common worship, we listen to the Lord’s word, proclaimed and shared in the Scriptures. For as St. Paul reminds us, faith comes from hearing. (Rom 10:17)

But the Scriptures also suggest other voices we need to hear. In the beginning of the Book of Exodus, the Lord hears the cries of his suffering people from their bondage in Egypt, and responds with his great act of liberation. Elsewhere, he is attentive to the poor and suffering, as in the book of Psalms: “When the humble see it, they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. For the Lord hears the needy, and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.” (Ps 69:32-33 - NRSV)

Called to Be Listeners

Surely in imitation of the Lord, we too are called to hear the cry of the poor, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised. This is the essence of Pope Francis’ invitation for us to go to the peripheries. In a world filled with noise, we are called to turn our attention to these quieter voices, often drowned out by the wealthy and the powerful. As a community of believers, we are called to hear the voice of the Lord, and to hear the voice of the poor.