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Homily-Listening to God's Word

The first reading is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy. The reading depicts the scene in which the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land. Before they enter the Promised Land Moses challenges the people to make a decision. They are to decide whether they will be faithful to the Lord their God as they enter the Promised Land. Moses tells the Israelites that if they are faithful to the Lord their God they will live a life of success and prosperity. They will receive rain for their crops and the Lord will drive out the nations before them as they go into the land they wish to occupy. If they are not faithful to the Law of the Lord they will experience destruction and despair. At times the people were faithful to the Lord and so experienced success at other times they were not faithful and experienced difficulty and exile.

The Gospel likewise calls us to make decisions. Jesus first says that not all of those who call him, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven. He goes on to say that not all of those who prophesied in his name nor exorcised demons nor worked mighty deeds in his name would inherit the kingdom of heaven. Only those who did the will of his heavenly Father would enter the kingdom of God. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven we have to live out the will of God our Father. While many have worked mighty deeds in his name Jesus says he does not know them. Therefore Jesus is saying that he comes to know us through our willingness to do God's will.

Jesus challenges the disciples to hear his words and to put them into practice. Jesus says that those who hear his words and put them into practice are like a wise man who builds his house on rock. When the rainy season came the storms had no effect on his house as it had been set solidly on rock. The one who does not listen to the words of Jesus and live them out is like a foolish man who does not listen to the words of Jesus and live them out. His house is completely destroyed.

Jesus tells his disciples this story so that they will decide to hear Jesus' words and live them out. In the same way this story should lead us to decide to hear Jesus' words and live them out in our lives.

What are the words of Jesus that we are called to hear and to live out?

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In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is presented as a teacher much like Moses who presents God's words to his people. In the Gospel, Jesus presents five separate discourses. The first and most well known is the Sermon on the Mount. The Gospel we hear today comes at the end of the Sermon of the Mount. Today's Gospel and especially the image of the wise man who builds his house on solid rock should cause us to reflect on the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and to ask ourselves whether we have heard and accepted Jesus' teaching and whether we are living out that teaching.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes. In this section Jesus sketches the values and attitudes needed to enter and enjoy God's kingdom. Jesus begins the Beatitudes by stating, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This beatitude reminds us that those who are happy are they who depend on God. Those who depend on God know that the kingdom of God will be theirs.

Jesus also calls the disciples to live lives characterized by mourning, peace, right relationship with God and others, purity of heart, meekness and mercy. **How well do we live out those values?**

Jesus then speaks about living out the Law. For Jesus it is not enough to merely live the Law. We must be a people who are willing to go to the root of the Law in making decisions. Jesus says that we must not only be a people who do not kill but we must not grow angry with our brothers and sisters. Not only must we not commit adultery; we must not have lust in our hearts. We must understand and live each of the commandments in the broadest way in order to truly understand the commandments. **How are we called to live the commandments in the broadest way?**

Jesus then teaches about the importance of loving not only our friends and relatives but that we must love our enemies. It is often easy to love our friends and relatives but in order to follow Jesus we must go beyond this love. We must be willing to pray for those who persecute us and willing to not retaliate against those who hurt us. Jesus summarizes the Law by stating that we are to "Do unto others as we want them to do unto us." The Gospel asks us to make difficult decisions concerning our relationships with others. **Will we be a people who genuinely try to love all? Will we live a life of retaliation or will we live in peace with others?**

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Jesus then puts before us a difficult image. Jesus challenges our proclivity to judge others. Jesus offers the image of the person who criticizes his brother for the speck in his eye without seeing the log in his own eye. We are to be a people who change ourselves before judging others. In the image we are to remove the log from our own eye before we help our brother or sister remove the speck from their eye. **How is Jesus calling us to be less judgmental of others and to change ourselves before we attempt to change others?**

Jesus then teaches about piety. He says that we are to be a people who give alms, who pray and who fast but we are not to do these things so as to be seen by others. **How often do we practice religion in such a way that we can be seen by others?**

Jesus then teaches the prayer that has become known as the Our Father. Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who sin against us." Jesus shows us that if we expect to be forgiven by God we need to forgive others." **Are we a people who are willing to forgive others? Do we understand that God will forgive us only if we forgive others?**

Jesus then teaches the disciples about the importance of trust in God. Jesus says that we worry too much about material possessions such as our living conditions and clothes. Jesus says that God cares even for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. How much more does he care for us. Since God cares for us and values us this much we need not worry about having enough to eat *or to drink or to wear*. **Do we worry about our possessions without seeing how much God cares for us?**

Jesus asks us to decide whether we will hear and live out his words. **Do we listen to God? Do we live out the will of God in our lives?**

To hear Jesus' words we need to be a people of the Scriptures. We need to be a people who both read and pray the Scriptures. We need to be a people who spend quiet time with the Lord. To be a people who hear the word of the Lord we need to discern the word of the Lord through the people and circumstances in our lives. We must be a people who live out the will of the Lord in our lives. The Sermon on the Mount shows us that doing God's will means we are to be a people who depend on God, are merciful, forgiving, not judgmental, and who trust in God's providential care over our lives. May we continue to hear the words of Jesus and continue to live out the will of the Lord for our lives.