Choral Communion - Sunday 30th April 2017. Easter 2 (3rd Sunday of Easter).

1 Peter 1: 17-23; Acts 2: 14a, 36-41; Luke 24: 13-35.

*Title: 'Listen...with the ear of your heart'. Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue: Verse 1.*

It seems somewhat apposite at a Musical Festival Eucharist to think about the whole concept of listening. We seem to be living in a time when increasingly we are failing to pay attention to what one another is saying and what they are not saying. This seems to be as true in our national and international life just as much as it can be true in our personal encounters. On the national scene, many of our politicians as well as many members of the general population were taken completely by surprise at the result of last year's referendum, just as more recently there was equal surprise experienced at the calling of a General Election. Internationally, the deteriorating situation between the West and North Korea seems to have crept upon us unawares. And more locally, we can become so caught up in our own individual life's trajectory than we can fail to listen to the fragmenting of community life (especially in the areas of health ans social care) taking place right under our noses. Whatever the context, whether politician or pauper, we are creatures that crave relationship. If there is a failure to be listened to, the natural consequence can be the sound or the silence of explosion or implosion. We all have the need to tell our stories and we all need others to listen to them. As well as listening to the voices of one another in national, international and local contexts, we need to listen accurately to the voices within our religious texts. Sadly many do not listen accurately to these texts at all and we are only to aware of the results, bigotry, bullets and bombing. We need to be prepared to be changed by the stories that we hear. How can we be helped to listen more accurately to the many voices around us crying out to be heard? Or to borrow an idea from *Vs 1 of the Prologue of the*  *Rule of St. Benedict: 'How might we listen with the ears of our hearts?'*

At this music festival, I would like to suggest that music can be of help. For those of us who listen to music (and that of course includes those who perform music) it can be easy to take for granted the fact that we listen to music on a number of different levels. We listen to its **sound** and its **silence**; its **pitch**, its **rhythm** and its **tempo**; its **dynamics**, **harmonic language** and its **colour**. And of course we can listen to to the outworking of its **form**. Or to put it another way, we can listen to: that which is openly articulated and that which is not; the shape of individual strands of sound; that which sets a voice apart from its context; whether softer voices are being drowned out by louder ones; whether individual voices are in harmony or conflict with those around them; the feelings or moods that these encounters generate; and we can listen to how the whole is structured and held together. Can music help us with the way that we listen outside of music? Might the application of this multi layered listening, for example, help us listen afresh to our gospel? I would like to suggest that is can, if following St. Ignatius' lead, our imagination is allowed to play its part.

In our gospel reading then, what is being openly articulated and what is not? The two disciples en route to Emmaus are wondering whether the resurrection of Jesus, which seems to have happened in the still of the night, has actually happened or not. Their confusion is compounded by the fact that these accounts are emanating from some women amongst their number, who in the eyes of the law, simply had no voice. It is as though Jesus resurrection gives voice to those who are voiceless. All that follows in our gospel reading is a response to that. Further more, arguably the central point of this reading happens in silence that follows sound. Jesus blesses, breaks the bread and gives.

What gives shape to individual voices of this gospel encounter? Because of the confusion of the two disciples and the ironic presence of the risen Lord which they initially fain to perceive, the three voices are grouped as 2 + 1. Whilst the names of Cleopas and Jesus are named, it has been suggested that the other disciple could the be Cleopas's wife. (Indeed, in John's gospel, we are told that Mary the wife of Clopas is one of the women at the foot of the cross. Could this be her? Whether she is or she isn't the 2+1 become 3 around that table when the disciple's confusion finally evaporates.

What, if anything, sets these voices apart from their contexts? Because of what has already been said it is clear that, until the very end of this gospel passage, the two disciples are operating in a different reality to their risen Lord. It's as though they are operating in parallel realities, but realities that somehow slot together, in the way that musically, 6/8 and ¾ time signatures slot together. If the disciples' account of events in Jerusalem had been repeated in full, it may then have been possible to discern individual characteristics amongst them, especially if one of them had been at the foot of the cross.

Are softer voices are being drowned out by louder ones? In this encounter all the voices of those present seem to be being heard clearly. That which is important is that, in the case of the two disciples, they are being enabled, by their interaction with their Lord, to articulate their inmost thoughts even before they realise who he is. When they realise who he is in the soft silence that accompanies the breaking of the bread, they make sure their voices are heard back in Jerusalem as they relate his experience to the other disciples.

Are individual voices in harmony or conflict with those around them? Whilst the 2 voices of the disciples are in harmony with each other, it is not so much that they out of out of harmony with the voice of Jesus, but have their tonality changed by listening to him. I imagine them being in a minor key with lots of discords that need resolving, with Jesus' voice being in a major key. Around the meal table at their moment of recognition, it is as though all discords disappear and major tonality shines through.

What feelings or moods are generated? Following on from what has just been said, there is the confusion of the 2 disciples which contrasts starkly with the clear message of the risen Lord. By the end of this gospel encounter their confusion lifts to such an extent that they feel duty bound to rush back to Jerusalem and help dissipate their friend's confusion.

How is this multi layered listening structured and held together?

When the journey begins, a two voice introduction gives way to a single voice question (calling to mind the question asked by the youngest child present at the beginning of Jewish passover celebrations). Whilst 2 voices, respond a single voice remains silent. When it explains the significance of these events it is the 2 voices that listen. The 3 voices only come together around a meal when it is as though the words of the Last Supper are reprised and the reality of resurrection rushes in. When Jesus, in the moment of their recognition disappears, the journey is reversed. The events of the encounter of the 2 with the 1 is reprised to their friends back in Jerusalem.

Whilst this morning's multi faceted musical listening might have been fun, I hope that it's underlying idea not only better helps us discern what is really being conveyed in a particular biblical text, but encourages us, through constant practice, to apply this listening technique, not only to our personal encounters, but in the way that we discern and respond to the many conflicting voices that are taking place within our country and our world; that, in short, it will encourage us to discern the voice of God. Such listening can only begin and end with silence. But then, just as an audience applauds, our response must be action.