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The Importance of Listening to God's Word

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Man is a person of listeners nature, so he listens to people, listens raptly to animals voices and to voices of the nature. He also goes beyond the material world – for he experiences God and listens to God alone. The Holy Scripture of the Old and the New Testament emphasizes the significance of hearing to God's word. "The Revelation is in its nature God's word directed to man".¹ The Holy Scripture is the testimony of God speaking to people. Undying God's word may be seen in such forms as: information, appeal, command and band, threat, judgment and condemnation. This word needs the answer coming from the side of man, family, nation and mankind. In the light of the Bible "faith comes from what is heard" (Rom 10:17)² while in the Greek misteries and in the east gnosis the relation of man towards God bases mainly on the vision".³

The Christian should listen to God's word with faith and obedience, because his worldly goods and his future happiness depend on it. So in contemporary homiletics listening to God's word is seen as a main problem.⁴ This man's important and honourable duty is still actual nowadays in the world dominated by man's word. So let's stress this important problem concerning the listening of God's word in the history of salvation and consider it in the light of the Holy Scripture of the Old and the New Testament. Let's also ask what man should do to listen to God's word in a faithful and pious way.

¹ Ch. Augrain, *Sluchać*, in: *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, Ed. X. Leon-Dufour, Poznań 1973, p. 885.

² The quotations are from: The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version, Oxford University Press New York 1989.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 885.

⁴ See: *Sluchacz słowa*, red. W. Przychyna, Kraków 1998 [Since then abbr.: SSl]; W. Przychyna, *Sluchanie słowa Bożego a posłannictwo Kościoła*, in: SSl, p. 55-62; B. Gaudeul, *Smak słowa Bożego*, Kraków 2002, pp. 43-70; F.J. Calvo Guida, *Homilética*, Madrid 2003, p. 25 and next; O.C. Edwards, Jr., *Elements of Homiletic. A Method for Preparing to Preach*, New York 1983, p. 24 and next. See also: *Hörer und Predigt. Ein Tagungsbericht*, Hrsg. O. Wehner, M. Frickel, Würzburg 1960, pp. 5-8; P.M. Achtemeier, *Word of God*, in: *Concise Encyklopedia of Preaching*, Ed. W.H. Willimon, R. Lischer, Louisville 1995, pp. 512-514.

1. The testimony of the Scripture of the Old Testament

The history of salvation expressed in the Old and the New Testament shows that God often spoke to people and in this way he taught them to listen to his word⁵. It is known through the Revelation that faith may grow stronger when we listen to God's word and not only see him – although this second way is also shown in the Scripture. Looking for God's face and seeing him was what the Israelite were looking and praying for. Nobody among the living can see God – for if he saw him or heard him directly, he had to die (Ex 20: 19, Deut 5:25). Living on the earth, man should listen to God's word and obey it – to deserve seeing God.

The Old Testament says several times about listening to God's word. How important it is we may see reading such expressions: "Thus says the Lord" (Ex 9: 13); "Hear, O Israel" (Deut 6:4); "Hear the word of the Lord" (Isa 1:10); "... listen O earth for the Lord has spoken" (Isa 1:2). In this way, God speaks to people for they listened his word, obeyed him and listened his word and fulfilled it in everyday duties. Listening to God's word is a foundation of existence and welfare of God's people. Sin, however, in its essence exists because man does not want to obey God's word and is irredeemable and disobedient toward God.

The prophet Jeremiah calls: "Hear the word of Lord, O house of Israel" (Jer 2:4). In the same way the prophet Amos proclaims: "Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt" (Am 3:1). And the wise man says: "Let the wise also hear and gain in learning, and the discerning acquire skill (...⁶) Hear my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:5.7.8).

The classical example is the text from Deuteronomy including famous Shema Israel that stresses the essence of hearing God's word. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with All your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead., and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut 6:4-9).

Those words should be repeated every day again and again by every pious Israelite who desires to be deeply touched by God's will. There is a calling there not to hear only directly God's words, but to love him with all heart and might. This may be expressed in three versions: hear and therefore love, hear to love – and at last hear which means – love. As we can see, true listening of God's words may be realized only when man is fully involved and when he subordinates to God all

⁵ J. Chmiel, *Sluchanie słowa Bożego w Starym Testamencie*, in: SSL, pp. 65-72; W. Głowa, *Zasadnicze racje sluchania słowa Bożego*, Premisla Christiana, vol. IX, Przemyśl 2001, p. 217; Idem, *Sluchacz słowa Bożego w świetle Biblii*, in: *Kościół na drogach historii*, red. J. Wolczański, Lwów - Kraków 1999, pp. 501-517.

⁶ J. Chmiel, *Sluchanie...*, pp. 68-69.

spheres of his personality. Therefore man cannot accept God's word intellectually by ears only, but it must be placed in the centre of his life – so should be present in his feelings and activity⁷.

God's word should be accepted with faith: "And he believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6). And the psalmist calls: "Then they believed his words; they sang his praise" (Ps 106: 12). God's word ought to be accepted with fidelity: "Then I shall have an answer to those who taunt me, for I trust in your word" (Ps 119: 42) – and also with confidence: "Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word" (Ps 119: 74). God's word should also be accepted with fear: "Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words" (Ps 119: 161). God proclaims: "But this is the one whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word" (Isa 66:2). The prophet calls: "Hear the word of the Lord, you who tremble at his word" (Isa 66:5). God's word man should also accept with admiration: "In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust"; I am not afraid; what can flesh do to me?" (Ps 56: 4); "In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord whose word I praise, in God I trust" (Ps 56: 10-11) – and also with joy: "I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil" (Ps 119: 162).

It is important – as according to Hebrew meaning of word truth, hear, accept God's word – it does not mean to preak up ear toward truth, it means to open our heart toward it (Acts 16:14). And to put it into practice (Mt 7:24); it just means to be obedient and submissive⁸. Hearing God's word one ought to accept it in heart with the entire confidence and obedience. For this word is God's revelation and the life's rule – being in fact the origin of light: "your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119: 105). God's word includes also promises and ensures people better existence in the future.

As it is the word of God alone, one ought to listen to its preachers regardless of whether it is spread by Moses or by any of the prophets . God says: "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you..." (Deut 6:3); "You must diligently keep the commandments of the Lord, your God, and his decrees and his statutes that he has commanded you" (Deut 6:17); "Hear the word of the Lord, you people of Gomorrah!" (Isa 1:10); "You shall say to them, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant, which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt..." (Jer 11:3-4); "Hear the words of this covenant and do them" (Jer 11:6). Man should keep God's word in his heart: "keep these words that I am

⁷ L. Scheffczyk, *Von der Heilsmacht des Wortes. Grundzüge einer Theologie des Wortes*, München 1966, p. 147; J. Schreiner, *Hören auf Gott und auf sein Wort in der Sicht des Deuteronomiums*, Leipzig 1962, p. 38; E. Schick, *Wort Gottes. In der Schrift*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Bd. 10, Freiburg² 1965, Sp. 1232-1234.

⁸ Ch. Augrain, *Sluchać*, in: *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, red. X. Léon-Dufour, Poznań 1973, p. 885; K. Lammers, *Hören*, in: *Bibel-Lexikon*, Hrsg. H. Haag, Leipzig 1969, Sp. 760.

commanding you today in your heart" (Deut 6:6). "No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (Deut 30:14).

God's word ought to be introduced then into our life: "Hear, therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you..." (Deut 6:3); It is forcibly expressed in Psalm 119 where either the question and the answer may be found: "How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word" (Ps 119: 9). So there is an advice: "Deal bountifully with your servant, so that I may live and observe your word" (Ps 119: 17). And then the psalmist says: "I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word" (Ps 119: 101). Man should count on God's words and to pin hopes upon them: "... Then I shall have an answer for those who taunt me, for I trust in your word" (Ps 119: 42); "Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word" (Ps 119: 74); "My soul languishes for salvation; I hope in your word" (Ps 119: 81); "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope" (Ps 130: 5).

His answer to God's word expresses man by the proper spiritual attitude defined by the theological virtues that determine his union with God. To God's word answers man by faith in revelation of living God and his plans. And as God's word brings him promises, so he answers it with the strong hope. As God's word includes rules of life, so an indispensable form of answer to it is man's love shown in righteous everyday life: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding to you today in heart" (Deut 6:5-6).

But sometimes man does not hear God and becomes irresponsive to his calling: "This is what you requested of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said: If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more, or ever again see this great fire, I will die" (Deut 18:16). Therefore God will speak to people by the prophet Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command" (Deut 18:18). At the same time Lord the God warns: "Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable" (Deut 18:19). The essence of man's tragedy is the fact that he is irresponsive to God's calling, to his word, he slights it. The ears and hearts of such people are "incircumcised" – that is why God calls through the prophet Jeremiah: "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? So their ears are closed, they cannot listen. The word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure on it" (Jer 6:10). So God announces that those who "are circumcised only in the foreskin" – and other nations – will be affected with the penance: "For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart" (Jer 9:24-26)⁹.

⁹ E. Sobieraj, *Po śladach słowa Bożego*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 26-32; G. Schöttler, *Wort Gottes. Praktisch-theologisch*, in: *Lexikon der Pastoral*, Ed. K. Baumgartner, P. Scheuchpflug, Bd. 2, Freiburg 2005, Sp. 1855-1856.

Although man should answer the word with the faith, God however takes into account man's disbelief when he says to the prophet Ezekiel: "You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house" (Ezek 2:7). But when people are absolutely irredeemable, God alone may cause that they will not be able to hear: "See, their ears are closed, they cannot listen. The word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it" (Jer 6:10). Contempt for God's word will bring the well-deserved punishment: "Hear, O earth, I am going to bring disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not given heed to my words; and as for my teaching, they have rejected it" (Jer 6:19).

God may however open man's ear and heart to his word and make him his disciple: "The Lord has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward" (Isa 50:5). For God "opens their ears to instruction, and commands that they return from iniquity" (Job 36:10). God will "pierce" or open the ears of those who are deaf when the time of Messiah comes: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped"; "Listen, you that are deaf; and you that are blind, look up and see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like my dedicated one, or blind like the servant of the Lord? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear" (Isa 42:18-20). And then there is the mistaken's reflection: "...Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not obey?" (Isa 42:24). That is why the prophet Izaiah prays: "Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears!" (Isa 43:8).¹⁰

So it may not be a passive hearing only – or indifferent one – that allows only to get some information. In contrary – it should be the existential hearing involving the whole human being – expressed in the entire "adsum" – I am present. Man who listens to God's voice is fully present, conscious, ready to accept his word. The example of such listening is Samuel who answers God: "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:10). What fruit of such listening are we may read in the further text: "As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his word fall to the ground" (1 Sam 3:19). When man is fully involved into listening to God's word, he realizes himself and perfects his personality¹¹.

As we can see, the theological reflection over listening to God's word has been developed in the Old Testament. When we listen in an authentic way, then we may relate God's words to our life. The example of such relation is king David who hearing the prophet Nathan's words: "You are the man" (2 Sam 12:7) answered: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam 12:13). So he related God's word to himself, admitted his immorality and subconsciously maintained: "It is me that the Lord has spoken to and to me his word has been related". It is similarly expressed in the Latin saying: "Mea res agitur" – it concerns me – and the matter is of an extraor-

¹⁰ Ch. Augrain, *Sluchać...*, p. 885.

¹¹ E. Sobieraj, *Po śladach...*, pp. 21, 22, 25.

dinary importance because on it depends my redemption or condemnation. If man listens to God's word involving his entire personality and existence and fully accepts it – then he relates God's truth to his unique and unrepeatable life situation. Such a man causes that God's word lightens, straightens and cleanses his life. In this way, timeless God's word is present in lives of people nowadays.

God's word written by the inspired authors may serve people for loud reading: "Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" (Ex 24:7). "Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi..." (Deut 31:9) and he ordered: "... you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing" (Deut 31:11). King Josiah "... read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord" (2 Kings 23:2). And the prophet Ezra "... read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday..." (Neh 8:3). The written God's word should serve man as his personal reading: "When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes" (Deut 17:18-19).

God's word should also be the subject of personal meditation: "My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may meditate on your promise" (Ps 119:148). "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night" (Ps 1:1-2). However Job shows the emotional attitude towards this word: "I have not departed from the commandment of his lips: I have treasured in my bosom the words of his mouth" (Job 23:12).

God's word may also be a source of light and support in case of doubts and adversities – as it has been mentioned by the prophet Daniel: "I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes" (Dan 9:2-3).

As the God's word preserved in a written form is present among God's people, so the faithful community is a model of listening to this word and stimulates the chosen nation to conversion. It stimulates also the chosen nation to renew again and again the Covenant – by following the words written in the found book of Covenant (cf. 2 Kings 23:1-3). God's word stimulates the faithful community to be converted, admit to sins and change life for better (cf. Ezra 9:10-15). The eager studying of God's word causes that the Jews were ready to live in booths during the festival of the seventh month, read from the book of the law of God (cf. Neh 8:14-18) and renew the Covenant (cf. Neh 10:1-4).

In the Old Testament God's word either proclaimed and heard – is spread in a form of dialogue – so it is included into mutual talking between God and people.

The dialogue of such kind is supported by divine revelation and by faith – and mediators are chosen people – wise men and prophets. This dialogue will achieve significant importance in the New Testament when people reach fullness of God's word in Person of Incarnate Word.

2. Testimony of the Scripture of the New Testament

Christian religion appeals to listening to infallible God's word – and Christian is a man living with Christ word¹². Other ancient religions, especially Greek religion, appealed to the deity that might be recognized due to mysterious cults in a form of theophany and herophany. The essence of Christian faith is Incarnate Word: "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1:18). Although nobody among living can see God, therefore who has seen Christ, God's Incarnate Son, "...has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9)¹³. We may see God fully only in heaven, when we will see him "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). But there, on the earth, man should listen to God's word and fulfil it – this way he will deserve seeing God.

Jesus Christ firmly stresses the importance of listening to God's word¹⁴ and contrasts it with the faith that bases on sign seeing. When the royal official asked him to heal his son, he answers: "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" (Jn 4:48). In the parable about a rich man and Lazarus the rich man asks Abraham: "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house – for I have five brothers – that may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment" But "Abraham replied, They have Moses and the prophets" (Lk 16:27-30).

Our faith and redemption depends on listening to God's word. Characteristic are words Jesus said to Thomas when he did not want to believe Apostles' words about resurrection: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe" (Jn 20:29).

Jesus stressed the importance of listening to God's word several times and he said it was the source of blessing: He was told: "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you" But he replied: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:20-21). So Jesus equates listeners to God's word with close family members. Similar situation we may see in the text: "When he was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you". But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk 11:27-

¹² H. Witczyk, *Sluchanie słowa Bożego w Nowym Testamencie*, in: SŚI, pp. 73-103; W. Głowa, *Zasadnicze racje słuchania Słowa Bożego...*, p. 218 and next; H. Witczyk, *Sluchacz słowa Bożego w świetle Biblii...*, pp. 517-532.

¹³ E. Sobieraj, *Po śladach...*, p. 45.

¹⁴ K. Kertelge, *Wort Gottes. Biblisch*, in: *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, Hrsg. P. Eicher, Bd. 4, München 2005, pp. 462-465; E. Biser, *Wort Gottes. Systematisch*, in: *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, Hrsg. P. Eicher, Bd. 4, München 2005, pp. 470-471.

28). The importance of listening to God's word is also stressed in the pericope of Mary and Martha. About Mary who "sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying" he says that "she has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" (Lk 10:39-42).

So listening to God's word is very important in man's life. That is why Christ insistently encourages: "Let anyone with ears to hear listen" (Mk 4:9). But to those who don't want to listen he turns with the severe threats: "If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town" (Mt 10:14-15).

Man's happiness and redemption depends on listening to God's word and its acceptance; in contrary – a contempt towards God's word leads to the biggest tragedy – condemnation¹⁵. Before Ascension Jesus ordered Apostles: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15-16)

We may be saved owing to faith which is a fruit of listening to God's word – as St. Paul says: "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). How important is listening to God's word and keeping faith shows Jesus when he says: Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believe him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn 5:24).

So we can see that listening to God's word is an essential duty that raises faith and enables redemptive meeting with Christ¹⁶. Therefore the fruitful listening may be achieved under certain conditions. Faithful and ardent listening to God's word stimulates fervent praying and causes that we may be fully united with God. So by keeping the word in heart Christian realizes his honourable devotion towards holiness. The best example of listening to God's word is Mary twice mentioned by St. Luke: "But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). "His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:51)¹⁷.

To keep Lord's words means just to remember about them, have them in front of eyes, think of them while we wake up and go to sleep, when away and at home. But first of all, we should bind them as a sign on our hand (cf. Deut 6:8) – so observe them diligently in everyday life. St. James says: "But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves" (Jas 1:22). "But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing" (Jas 1:25).

¹⁵ F. Winter, *Die Predigt*, in: *Handbuch der Praktischen Theologie*, Bd. 2, Berlin 1974, p. 236; E. Sobieraj, *Po śladach...*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁶ O. Brosse, *La prédication*, in: *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, éd. B. Lauret, F. Refoule, vol. 5, Paris 1983, pp. 142-143; A. Lewek, *Śłuchanie słowa Bożego źródłem wiary*, in: *SSI*, pp. 165-175.

¹⁷ H. Witzkyk, *Śłuchanie słowa Bożego...*, pp. 97-100; W. Przyczyna, R. Wróbel, *Maryja wzorem słuchania słowa Bożego*, *Salvatoris Mater* 5/2 (2003), pp. 90-103; E. Sobieraj, *Po śladach...*, pp. 22-23.

The fervent listening to God's word means to accept it fully and to fulfil it in life. But to listen to God's word in this way man needs God's support. Jesus says: "If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God" (Jn 9:46-47). Man listens fruitfully to God's word when he is united with God and open to his word. Yet a big grace is that man is "from God", exists in a unity with him. This has been done first by the grace of baptism which opens man to the grace of listening to God's word. Remaining in this grace means that we choose God constantly and are in a declared position towards the devil – dissuading us from listening to God's word.

When man chooses the devil he loses the grace of listening to God's word and closes himself to God's voice. Jesus says to the faithless Jews: "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him (...) But because I tell the truth you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin?" (Jn 8:44-46).

When we accept what father of all evil says, then God's word that is the truth, not only does not come to us, but this fact causes that our mind and heart grows dull – as it was said by Isaiah whom quotes Jesus: "You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them" (Mt 13:14-15; Isa 6:9).

The example of listening to God's word is Lydia. St. Luke writes: "A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us saying: «If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my hope. And she prevailed upon us»" (Acts 16:14-15). The grace of listening to God's word leads Lydia to conversion, faith and baptism. Christian should pray with devotion to reach such a grace for himself and other people. The ability to pray to God's word is therefore a big gift; to keep it we must pray constantly to the Holy Spirit and beg him we might be open to God's word¹⁸.

Although the true listening to God's word is God's gift, it needs therefore man's cooperation. The parable about a sower (Mt 13:1-23) shows that the listener should possess a deep faith, should be persistent, away from the cares of the day and should not worry about wealth that drowns out the word (Mt 13:7)¹⁹. The persistence means that we are able to stand quietly and patiently all the cares of the day – and not only to endure hard persecutions. According to Luke the true listen-

¹⁸ L. Scheffczyk, *Von der Heilsmacht...*, pp. 148-149.

¹⁹ H. Witczyk, *Sluchanie słowa Bożego...*, pp. 78-96.

ers to God's word are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance (Lk 8:15).

3. Listening that obliges to testify faith through word and life

Proclaiming God's word from its essence is an activity that is addressed towards a prepared listener²⁰. That is why contemporary homilets are vividly interested in the problem concerning the listening to God's word²¹ that may be considered under theological²², psychological²³ and sociological²⁴ aspect. Taking the matter under consideration, one should remember that man from his nature is a listener to the word. Since the moment he is born till death he listens to surrounding him nature and even on the deathbed, when he already is not able to speak, he listens, because – as they say – the sense of hearing withers last. So we have to be very cautious when we speak to dying person. By some means or other listens also deaf and deaf-and-dumb person.

Owing to listening man develops, enriches himself intellectually and spiritually. So ability to listening is a sign of health and personal identity²⁵. The extremely hard penance would be to imprison man in a total isolation, to deprive him of possibility to talk, get information, reading, listening to the radio and watching TV. That would truly be a diabolic penance. The importance of listening depends on person whom we listen to. The wiser man and of higher position – the more valued listening to him is. Of course, we are more eager to listen to wise people and to those who can provide practical wisdom. God as all-knowing and infallible fullness of wisdom does not mislead us, but wants give us the light of his truth²⁶. That is why listening to the words of God alone – Eternal Wisdom – is for man the highest value, the most important and honourable duty²⁷.

²⁰ M. Nicol, *Grundwissen praktische Theologie. Ein Arbeitsbuch*, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 92-93.

²¹ See: R. Bohren, *Predigtlehre*, München 1980⁴, p. 443 and next; G. Martin, *Czytanie Pisma Świętego jako słowa Bożego*, Kraków 1982, pp. 61-80.

²² L. Kuc, *Odpowiedź człowieka na głoszone mu słowo Boże*, in: *Teologia przepowiadania słowa Bożego*, red. L. Kuc, Warszawa 1971, p. 240 and next; A. Lewek, *Współczesna odnowa kaznodziejstwa*, 2: *Zarys homiletyki ogólnej*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 104-109.

²³ A. Vergote, *Der heutige Mensch als Empfänger der Botschaft*, in: *Handbuch der Verkündigung*, ed. B. Dreher [and others], Freiburg 1970, pp. 22-36; H. Jaroszewicz, *Klasyczne ujęcie charakterologicznych uwarunkowań słuchania słowa Bożego*, in: *SSI*, pp. 131-143; W. Chaim, *Psychoanalityczne ujęcie uwarunkowań słuchania słowa Bożego*, in: *SSI*, pp. 144-162.

²⁴ J. Kołodziejczyk, *Charakterystyka religijności słuchaczy kazań*, in: *SSI*, pp. 197-218. See: D. Grasso, *La predicazione alla comunità cristiana*, Roma 1969, pp. 375-387.

²⁵ Ch. Bunnars, *Die Hörer*, in: *Handbuch der Predigt*, Hrsg. K.-H. Bieritz [and others], Berlin 1990, pp. 139-143.

²⁶ A. Sorrentino, *Sztuka przewodniczenia celebrazjom liturgicznym. Praktyczne sugestie dla kapłanów*, Kraków 2001, pp. 11-113.

²⁷ Ch. Bunnars, *Die Hörer*..., p. 142; R. Heue, R. Lindner, *Predigen lernen*, Gladbeck/Westfalen 1980, pp. 57-72; Th. Filthaut, *Verkündigung*, in: *Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, Bd. 2, München 1963, pp. 766-768.

Man from his nature crosses the material world, is transcendent and open to reality and to the word coming from beyond. God meets man, shows him his love in words full of paternal care. God's word enlightens, broadens and develops man who through faith and baptism is God's child²⁸. However, when we disregard God's words and do not listen to them – that leads us to regress and even to condemnation. So the preacher should more often tell the faithful that listening to God's word is also nowadays man's important and honourable duty²⁹.

The fervent and faithful listening to God's word causes that man wants to give the word to other people. When by God's word our faith is deeper – this means that we are prepared to confirm it by our life and to share our religious experiences with other people. The duty to share the word is expressed in the mentioned text from Deuteronomy: "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deut 6:6-7). In the New Testament people listening to God's word and believing in it almost spontaneously become its proclaimers. The example is the good Samaritan who tells her countrymen about Jesus: "Many Samaritans from that city believed him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done" (Jn 4:39). Similarly two disciples from Emmaus when they recognized resurrected Christ, "That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem (...). Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Lk 24:33.35). The apostles proclaimed Gospel eagerly and in spite of persecution they said: "for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Primary Christians testified proclaimed God's word through the sacrifice of life and martyr blood. The authentic listener to God's word becomes at the same time its witness, because he materializes it in his life and passes it on to others³⁰. For listening to God's word cannot be understood only as individualistic and private matter. Christ demands from his listeners and disciples to be his witnesses. And this testimony is especially given through the Holy Spirit opening man's mind and heart to God's word: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

* * *

Listening to God's word is a very important activity as man's faith and redemption depends on it. That is why the preacher should more often tell about this his faithful and encourage them to testify their attitude towards Gospel through word

²⁸ L. Kuc, *Odpowiedź człowieka...*, pp. 274-287; E. Sobieraj, *Po śladach...*, pp. 18-20.

²⁹ Z. Adamek, *Homiletyka*, Tarnów 1992, pp. 222-237; R. Rogowski, *Człowiek jako słuchacz słowa Bożego*, in: SŚI, pp. 107-116.

³⁰ Z. Adamek, *Homiletyka...*, pp. 222-237; R. Rogowski, *Człowiek jako słuchacz słowa Bożego...*, pp. 107-116.

and life³¹. The real man's tragedy is when he closes his heart to God's word and when his lack of faith comes from the excessive belief that he is the wisest creature. That is why we should more often call listeners to praying for non-believers and religious indifferent – and ask the Holy Spirit to open their minds and hearts towards God's word.

The sign of contemporary world is the multitude of information that “bombs” us every day. In the face of this fact people must learn to choose what is most important – as very limited is our time on the earth. God who is love still comes to man with the word of truth and eternal life. Listening to God's word is the most important and honourable activity in man's life. So in the excess of activity and in situation when he still is in a hurry, he should look for whiles of silence and time for reflection, meditation and praying. Adam Mickiewicz – Polish national bard – has expressed it as follows: “God talk to us in silence; whose heart is silent is able to hear him”.

Let's finish our reflections with the cardinal John Henry Newman's pray³²:

“I need Thee to teach me day by day, according to each day's opportunities and needs. Give me, O my Lord, that purity of conscience which alone can receive Thy inspirations. My ears are dull, so that I cannot hear Thy voice. My eyes are dim, so that I cannot see Thy tokens. Thou alone canst quicken my hearing, and purge my sight, and cleanse and renew my heart. Teach me to seet at Thy feet, and to hear Thy word. Amen”.

DONIOSŁOŚĆ SŁUCHANIA SŁOWA BOŻEGO

Streszczenie

Człowiek ze swej istoty jest słuchaczem słowa, dzięki czemu czerpie wiedzę i mądrość życiową. Szczególnie ważne i doniosłe w jego życiu jest słuchanie samego Boga, pełni prawdy i mądrości. Religia chrześcijańska opiera się na słuchaniu i wypełnianiu słowa Bożego. Pismo Święte Starego Testamentu często mówi o wielkim znaczeniu słowa Bożego w życiu ludzi i całego narodu wybranego. Słuchanie tego słowa jest źródłem światła, nadziei, błogosławieństwa, radości i pomyślności. Dlatego człowiek powinien bardzo cenić sobie słowo Boże i żyć nim na co dzień. Jeżeli zaś nie wierzy, zamyka uszy i serce na słowo Boże, odrzuca je, czekają go nieszczęścia i kary. W Nowym Testamencie Jezus Chrystus – Słowo Boże wcielone – objawia ludziom miłość Boga i wzywa do przyjmowania z wiarą dobrej nowiny. Błogosławieni są ci, którzy z wiarą słuchają słowa Bożego, zachowują je w sercu i wypełniają, a Maryja jest najlepszym tego wzorem. Każdy chrześcijanin powinien usilnie prosić Ducha Świętego o łaskę słuchania słowa dla siebie i dla

³¹ M. Śnieżyński, *Jak wychowywać ludzi do słuchania*, in: SŚI, pp. 289-297; E. Staniek, *Wychowanie do słuchania słowa Bożego*, in: SŚI, pp. 298-310; Ch. Bundschuh-Schramm, *Konkretion: Predigt*, in: *Handbuch praktische Theologie*, Ed. H. Haslinger, Mainz 2000², pp. 444-445.

³² J. Twardy, *Aby słowo wydało plon. O modlitwie głosiciela i słuchacza słowa Bożego*, Katowice-Ząbki 2005, pp. 167-168.

swoich bliźnich. Słuchanie słowa Bożego zobowiązuje człowieka do dawania świadectwa wiary słowem i życiem. Apostołowie odważnie głosili Ewangelię; mimo prześladowań stwierdzali: „Bo my nie możemy nie mówić tego, cośmy widzieli i słyszeli” (Dz 4,20). Dlatego kaznodzieje powinni częściej pouczać wiernych o wielkim znaczeniu słuchania słowa Bożego, zarówno w czasie liturgii, jak i poza nią, uczyć ich przyjmowania tego słowa w duchu głębokiej wiary i posłuszeństwa. Wychowywanie wiernych do słuchania słowa Bożego należy do węzłowych problemów homiletycznych.