Seventeenth Sunday in Year C
Matthew S. O'Donnell

**Lectionary 111:**
- Gen 18:20-32 [A theological reflection on divine justice]
- Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8 [Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me]
- Col 2:12-14 [The waters of baptism raise believers to new life]
- Luke 11:1-13 [Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray]

Possible preaching themes:

- The **waters of Baptism** offer the promise of new life. St. Paul speaks in a spiritual sense of the experience of being baptized as a dying that offers the gift of new life. It is Jesus who offers life to his followers. In relationship with Jesus, and through Baptism, forgiveness is offered.

- **God hears the cries of God’s people** and God has the power to answer one’s prayers. Voicing one’s needs to God is an act of faith, an act of trusting that God in fact has the capacity to answer prayer. It is a source of rejoicing when one’s call for help in answered, and it can be source of bewilderment when the response from God is offered in an unexpected way.

- As a teacher, Jesus offers the disciples a **form of prayer** that has been passed on through the generations. For Christians today, the instruction on how to pray that Jesus offered more than 2,000 years ago has become a foundational way of praising God, seeking God’s transformative power, and asking for the strength needed to fulfill God’s will for one’s life.

Possible scientific resources:

- **Water is the source of life** [https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/uncategorized/2019/biological-roles-of-water-why-is-water-necessary-for-life/#:~:text=Water’s%20extensive%20capability%20to%20dissolve,substances%20like%20oxygen%20or%20nutrients.]
  - Water is critically important for the survival of the human body, given “water makes up 60-75% of human body weight
  - The molecular makeup of water makes it bond well with other “polar” molecules
  - Water influences the shapes of cells and “also impacts some fundamental components of every cell: DNA and proteins”
• The ear is the organ of hearing and balance
  o The anatomy of the ear is complex
  o Three bones within the ear vibrate and fluid in the inner ear stimulates hairs, resulting in impulses sent to the auditory nerve to the brain
  o “The ear transforms sound vibrations in the external environment into nerve impulses that are conveyed to the brain, where they are interpreted as sounds.”

• What we learn is stored in our memory https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain-basics/memory/where-are-memories-stored
  o Three areas of the brain are involved with our explicit memories: hippocampus, neocortex, amygdala
  o Our explicit memories can be both episodic (experiences or episodes) and semantic (relating to facts): https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain-basics/memory/types-memory
  o Our learning can first be episodic and stored in the hippocampus; later, information could be transferred to the neocortex as general knowledge; the amygdala attaches emotional significance

Homily outline: God always hears us

• Many of us live in environments that are filled with plenty of sound
  o The sounds of
    ▪ Children playing, laughing, crying, screaming
    ▪ Streets filled with hustle and bustle
    ▪ Wildernesses of gentle breezes, pouring rains, deafening silence
    ▪ Conversations with friends, arguments with loved ones, passionate positions being shared
    ▪ Prayers being offered, praises sung to God, laments from the heart
  • There are times when what we say seems to go unheard, no matter how loud we might be
    ▪ Injustices that render too many voiceless in communities
    ▪ Pleas to loved ones expressing our deepest desires
    ▪ Conversations with God that make us wonder if God is actually listening

• Do we hear or are we really listening?
  o https://www.verywellmind.com/hearing-vs-listening-what-s-the-difference-5196734
  o Hearing and listening are not the same thing
    ▪ Hearing is passive, involuntary, and something that doesn’t require a whole lot of effort
• Listening is a choice, something that requires attention, an action that requires us to make sense of the sounds, the words, that reverberate within our minds and hearts
• As social beings we want to be listened to, and to live fully and authentically
• In community active listening is necessary

**How and what we hear is complex**
- The ear is an intricately composed organ that gives meaning to the vibration of sound
- The brain makes sense of what we hear
- But hearing loss is real: [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss)
- Our listening practices influence how and what we hear
  - For some, hearing loss can be avoided
  - Living in a “loud” world challenges our ability to really hear, and give meaning to, what we are experiencing
- Our human experience of hearing and hearing loss can have a spiritual effect
  - Frustrations
  - Feelings of isolation
  - Being socially withdrawn

**God both hears and listens**
- The Psalmist says (Ps 138): “I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart, for you have heard the words of my mouth”; “When I called you answered me”
- God listens to the words that come forth from our mouths, our hearts, our souls
- God hears not just what we voice, God listens to the deeper desires that sometimes we do not have the words to express
  - God listens to the lament
  - God listens to the pain
  - God listens to the joy
  - God listens to the need

**We are called to listen as God listens**
- With God, it’s not about our loudness—it’s about the desires of our hearts
- God actively listens to what we express, not out of obligation but instead out of true love
- Like God, we are called to hear the voices of our sisters and brothers by listening to what those around us are trying to express
- We listen actively, with open hearts and minds
We listen so that we can truly hear the deeper desires of those near and far from us.

- Our listening allows us to be the help for those in need of answers, support, care.
- Actively listening that leads to genuine concern makes God present to what we and others voice.
- The effect of being listened to is the feeling that we are never alone!

**Tags:** ear, hearing, listening, loneliness, psychology

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**About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative**

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way’s sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.