

Sunday Homily

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

5 SEPTEMBER 2021

YEAR B

“He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Mark 7:37

Illustration

Most of us take our five senses for granted. We cannot remember what it is like to be without the forms of communication which we learned so early on. Going abroad and being unable to speak the language returns us to our infantile state as we struggle to make ourselves understood. We again become vulnerable and exhausted with our efforts and understand better the trials experienced by those living with disability.

But God’s miracles extend into our scientific age to assist those more permanently disabled by their sensual loss. For example, there are now cochlear implants which allow some deaf people to hear through a series of electronic impulses. There is the possibility that one day retina implants will enable those blind from birth to see, even if only for a short time: time to see their loved ones’ faces and some of the wonders of which they have only heard.

God’s miracles are all around us: gifts that delight us and guide us towards a greater understanding of his love. This reassurance frees us to become more fully the people he made, whether or not our bodies or minds are physically complete.

Gospel Teaching

During Jesus’ ministry the miracles he performed always pointed beyond themselves. At a straightforward level he heals. Not just by what he says but by what he does. He is not afraid to touch people and puts his fingers in the man’s ears, touching his tongue with his own spittle. He gives of himself, physically and in terms of concentration and energy, and, as a result, the man discovers the freedom of hearing and speech.

At another level this process illustrates the concern which Jesus has to free the hearing and speech of all who listen to him, whether or not they experience disability, including us today. It is only when we hear him clearly that we can, in turn, live out and proclaim the truth of his message.

Some people are disabled by poverty or by discrimination against outsiders or foreigners, like the Syrophenician woman, alien to Jewish culture. But yet it was she who recognised Jesus' true status. When she challenged him with her depth of faith he realised that his ministry was for all people. Both she and the deaf man were completely open to Jesus, vulnerable in their total faith. Unlike the cynical, well-informed Pharisees, they did not presume they had the answers to life's questions.

We are sometimes hampered by our complicated knowledge: it can blind and deafen us. True wisdom is being conscious of what we do not know and remaining open to being taught. Jesus works hard to clarify our hearing and our sight, our understanding and our insight, so that with or without perfect physical senses our discipleship is of the best, God's truth is heard and God's will is done.

Application

Deafness and blindness are not necessarily physical conditions. The scribes were deaf to the full meaning of Jesus' teaching while hearing his words perfectly. Some of Jesus' disciples were blind to events which seem obvious to us in retrospect.

We are more likely to develop our sense of God and his working through us if we can recognise how deaf to his word we can become. When people believe they have all the answers, a monopoly of the truth, there is a danger that they reinforce their blindness and inability to hear.

Jesus will free us today, just as he freed the deaf man in the Gospel, when we are open and vulnerable, available to be approached and do not assume that we know everything. Jesus told us that to love God well we must become like little children; not childish, but childlike. With their ability to trust implicitly, children listen with open ears and see with unclouded vision.

And when we recognise our poverty, our littleness and our need for God, Jesus can work in us: to heal us in all our disabilities, to include us despite our differences and foreignness, and to teach us what we need to know in order to hear the word and act upon it.

These gifts are given to those who ask. This is how the kingdom of God is extended upon earth – by disciples attentive to their master. We are those disciples and Christ's Church relies upon our wisdom, insight and vision.