

SEPTEMBER 9, 2018

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 [IS 35:4-7A](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10](#)

R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!

Reading 2 [JAS 2:1-5](#)

Gospel [MK 7:31-37](#)

Again Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!"— that is, "Be opened!" — And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

HOMILY:

It has been about 15 years since, one Monday evening, I found myself racing around Dubuque, trying to get many things done. It was a day of much activity, many meetings, lots of discussions, lots of commotion. It was about 6:30 pm that it occurred to me that I had not had anything to eat all day! I spotted a restaurant, a Chinese buffet, and pulled my car into the lot. I'm not sure "all you can eat" was the best idea with this powerful hunger, but moderation and sense were swept away under a wave of "hangry." It wasn't a pretty scene, but soon I was satisfied, at least until breakfast. Sometime after 7:30, I finally arrived home to find that now obsolete invention, the "answering machine," blinking angrily at me. (This was before the cell-phone explosion!) Tired, I pushed the replay button, after which that inhuman "voice" said, "you have 12 messages." That's a lot! A bit of fear rose in my heart. Pressing the "replay" button, I first heard a good friend of mine say, "Scott, call your brother immediately, there's been a fire at your parents' house." The phone was answered by my sister-in-law who told me that a fire had destroyed my parents' home, but that neither mom or dad was home at the time. It seemed like the fire was a "total loss." Of course, it was not, because mom and dad were okay. Plans were made immediately to leave for Michigan, and late the next day, I greeted my mother, father, and two siblings in a hotel room in my parents' hometown. For the first five minutes or so, there were no words exchanged, just tears and long embraces, expressions of loss and gratitude that they were unharmed. We had more to say that words could handle. They would have failed. Words are a marvelous tool that, among creation, only humans can use; but when we really want to communicate, really want a deep human connection, silence is better. We chose that same silence to communicate with each other at the time of my mother's death two years ago too—and at times—still do now.

I don't tend to talk much about the devil, but since Jesus did, I feel I can do so. Assuming that the devil is the great tempter, tempting us away from the Lord and his way to life, how might he best do that? Knowing that we have God-given free will, his temptations would best be couched in something that is pleasing to us, which he then corrupts when it becomes a distraction from

God. What is most pleasing to us? **COMMUNION.** Communion—that is, union with others and union with God. And what is our most common means of communication with others? It is through sounds, through words. He might likely try to tempt us to think, for fuller life, we need more sounds, more words, more, more, more coming at us. And all we need to do is to look around our lives today to see that these more, more, more words are coming at us with increasing ease and fervor. These good words might become a distraction, a diabolical temptation from deeper communication and Communion that comes in silence.

“But,” you no doubt might say, “I’m not some monk that has made a vow of silence.” True, we make no vows of silence, but can we make a smaller “promise” to choose silence at least at some point in each day, some prayerful moment each day, in order to block out all competition for the voice of God? For if we insist on choosing the competition for the voice of God, the competition is going to win.

In the gospel, we see the importance of “going to the quiet.” There is a man in the gospel who cannot hear. We don’t know why he cannot hear, but he can’t. *How does Jesus heal him?* The gospel offers two parts of the healing. First, Jesus leads the man away from the crowd, the clamorous crowd, the noisy crowd. Next, Jesus opens his ears. Then the man can hear, then he can speak. In this, Jesus is showing us an example. If we want to hear the Lord, we’ll need two things: **FIRST**, go away from the commotion; **SECOND**, ask Jesus to open our ears so we can hear.

Why don’t we go to the quiet? I’ll speak for myself: out of fear. I’m afraid of the quiet, it can make me anxious. But, after about 30 years of seriously trying to learn prayer, I must tell you, if I don’t go to the quiet at least sometime each day, I am not going to hear and know God.

So, what’s to be done, we who are not monks, who have not made a vow of silence? **Let’s practice silence.** **FIRST:** Let’s go away from the commotion, at least a little bit, each day. It’s going to take some willpower, to turn off the TV, the computer, and the conversation; to put our infernal cell phones on silence; and to go to the quiet. We may need to help each other! **SECOND:** Ask Jesus to open the ears of our hearts, so we can listen. **Start small.** Read a short passage of the gospels, and then sit in the quiet and listen—and trust in the still small voice that is our God. As we see by watching Jesus in today’s gospel, the Lord wants us to be able to hear him and will help us to do so. God wants to have a word with each of us, his beloved children, a daily word. Can we come to quiet to hear him?

While we resolve to seek the silence, at least some each day, that can help us find a communion with God that is deeper than words, here comes a moment of supreme silence, after one last “amen” by each of us, at the minute of Communion. Communion, expressed in the silence of our hearts, is what our hearts are really longing for. Let’s feast in Communion and then let us help each other find other times of supreme Life that is communion in silence with our Lord. There alone can He be most fully found. There alone can we most fully find Life.