

Fr. Steven's Homily 8th/9th September 2018 - 23rd Sunday (B)

The ability to hear & to speak are two great gifts. Like all gifts they can be taken for granted, or even misused. We see this especially in the case of the elderly. When their hearing goes they retreat into silence.

Like the story I read about an elderly man who had serious hearing problems for a number of years. He went to the doctor & the doctor was able to have him fitted for a set of hearing aids that allowed him to hear almost perfectly. It was one of those new ones that fitted into the ear canal & was virtually invisible. He went back in a month to the doctor for a check up on his progress & the doctor said, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again." The gentleman replied, "Oh, I haven't told my family yet.... I just sit around & listen to the conversations.... I've changed my will three times!"

But even for us, whose hearing wouldn't be diagnosed medically as impaired, we hear at different levels & there are some people who though they hear, are not very good at listening. I'm sure **you** have experienced talking to someone who was not really interested in what you had to say. And how often have you caught yourself not listening to someone else?

The Gospel story of the healing of the deaf mute is striking because it is one of the few stories where the crowd makes the request of healing from Jesus. This is understandable given that the man cannot speak for himself, but the scene, as Mark writes it, is very touching. Mark tells us that the crowd brought the man to Jesus. 'They' beg Jesus to heal him, 'they' are ordered not to tell anyone about the miracle, but 'they' go straight out & tell everyone about it.

The Church has been mandated to impart that healing of hearing & the first place it does is at our baptism when the priest touches the baby's ears & mouth & prays – "The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear & the dumb speak, may he soon touch your ears to receive his word & your mouth to proclaim his faith to the praise & the glory of God." But by all accounts, the Church itself has not been a listening church & itself needs healing, but primarily healing is needed by those who have been hurt by the church.

I subscribe to an online magazine & this letter of the editor of "America", for me is a hopeful sign of healing in the future.

Dear Friends,

This letter is not a subscription renewal notice or a solicitation for support. I am writing to you from my heart about the crisis in the American church.

This is an agonizing time for the church in the United States. Catholics across the country are reeling from the recent disclosures of past sexual abuses committed by members of the clergy & the catastrophic failure of many of the church's leaders to protect the most vulnerable among us.

I want you to know that we at America share your feelings of anger, sorrow & fear. As I keep reminding the editorial team, however, we have the luxury of being able to do something in the midst of our sense of helplessness: We can do our jobs. That is what we've been doing this summer & what we will continue to do in the weeks, months & years ahead.

In short, America is here for you. We don't think of ourselves as just a magazine or a website. America Media is a ministry. As journalists, evangelists, as your fellow Christians, we promise to accompany you through this trial, to do everything in our power to provide you with the news, analysis & spiritual resources you need. Above all, we will strive every day to be faithful to our mission & motto to "Pursue the Truth in Love." We need to listen to the truths of the victims & survivors above all. We need to help them tell their stories. & we need to pursue the truth about the cover-ups & failures, no matter where it leads. But in order to do all of that, we also need a reason to keep the faith. Many people are asking right now why anyone would remain a Catholic in light of this scandal.

It's a fair question. I've heard from a lot of good, honest people who, looking at the record of crimes & cover-ups, ask how we can still talk about God or the church in any meaningful way.

In a recent Gospel reading at Mass, we were told that many of Jesus' disciples were abandoning him. He asked the Twelve Apostles if they were going to leave too. Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." As one of our executive editors said the other day, for those of us who choose to stay, Peter's words are the life raft we cling to amid the wreckage of the American church. But Peter's story doesn't end there. You know it well: Peter abandons Jesus, denying him three times. Yet after the resurrection, Jesus comes back for Peter, asking him three times, "Do you love me?" When Peter says "yes," Jesus replies: "Feed my sheep."

The summer of 2018 is not the first time that our faith has been tested. It will probably not be the last time, either. But the Gospel tells us that even when the church fails to be faithful to God, God never ceases to be faithful to us. God is loving us even now. The pain of abuse & betrayal is real, but so is the healing power of love & reconciliation. Jesus Christ still lives. Thus faith, hope & love will never die.

We are praying for you. Please pray for us.

Sincerely yours in Christ, Rev. Matthew F. Malone, S.J, Editor in Chief.

Let's pray in this Eucharist that Christ removes our blindness, opens our ears & loosens our tongues so that we speak up for those who are most in need of a healing word that brings them justice & peace.