

16<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Isaiah 35:4-7; Psalm 145(146):7-10; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37.

### **The deaf hear and the mute speak!**

The prophet Isaiah tells his listeners that the coming of God will be accompanied with the signs of great healing miracles: the blind will see, the lame walk, the deaf hear and the mute speak! Mark shows us that Jesus is indeed the Imman-u-el, God-among-us; in Jesus the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled.

This healing narrative is a very important episode; it has been adopted by the Church into its baptism liturgy. Following the child's baptism, the child's mouth and ears are touched and the 'Ephphatha' prayer is prayed; the Christian is invited to listen to God's word and to speak it unto the world!

There is a difference between simply hearing God's word and listening to it. Listening involves accepting and allowing God's word to influence the way one lives. I am often aware that I have heard someone speaking to me, but I am not sure I have listened to what the other person had to say. To listen one needs to pay attention and invest energy in the activity that is happening.

When I listen, I engage with the word and make it my own. Each one of us listens to the word in a different way because we bring to it our own knowledge and life experiences. Once I have opened myself to God's word, it becomes another 'voice' speaking within me, and influences whatever I say and do.

For the word of God to become alive, each one of us needs to listen to it attentively, accept it in our heart, and give it back to the world. God's word, literature, works of art or anything else, only become alive when it is listened to, interacted with, and handed down again. As Christians we are called to interact with God's word in our life.

Today's gospel narrative is a very good example of how we should interact with the gospel, tradition and the history of the Church. The word tradition, from the Latin verb tradere, means to hand down something. The gospels themselves are the fruit of tradition. The good news was handed down from the apostles to the first Church; that is why we have five different gospel traditions. (Yes, I did write five. I consider Paul to be the first gospel to be written.)

Tradition is a risky business. When something is handed down, it has to be let go of and trusted in the hands of the person receiving it. The risk is that the person who receives may drop and destroy the object being handed down, but if tradition is not received, then it is lost!

Each time tradition is handed down, it is changed, as it interacts with the many other voices within me and I make it my own. One way to pray with God's word is to gather as a group and together listen to God's word and then share how God's word has been changed and has changed each member of the group. The word of God that is alive, gives us new life.

As different theologians, scholars and preachers listen to and speak God's word, different commentaries and studies of the bible and of tradition are written. Each author brings to the word of God a new way of looking at this word, depended on his or her experience. The best commentators or preachers are those who can show that they have opened themselves to receive God's word and made it their own, thus writing a new gospel in their own life.

'The Lord has made the deaf hear and the mute speak. May he touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father.' May we always listen to God's word and proclaim it faithfully in our life.

Fr Mario