

Homily - Mk. 7: 31-37

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

4th September 2021, Vigil Mass, Riverstown

“He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak”

Helen Keller who was both blind and deaf used to say “Blindness cuts us off from things, but deafness cuts us off from people, and so she says, deafness is the greater handicap”. Well, when we are totally deaf, a door to the world around us closes. We begin to feel lonely and abandoned. We become a stranger in our own land.

The Scottish Theologian William Barclay quotes a prayer written by a deaf person. And a portion of it reads thus: “O God, the trouble with being deaf is that most people find deaf folks a nuisance. They sympathize with people who are blind and lame, but they get irritated and annoyed with people who are deaf. As a result, deaf people are apt to avoid other people and become isolated from the hearing world”.

That poignant prayer gives us an insight into how it feels to be deaf-much less deaf and dumb.

Today’s Gospel describes how Jesus, by healing a deaf man with a speech impediment, fulfills Isaiah’s Messianic prophecy: “The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unsealed”. The ailments

listed by Isaiah are symbolic of our interior illnesses: blindness to the needs of our neighbor, unwillingness to hear God's voice and the inability to speak words of praise and gratitude. Through this miracle story, Mark the evangelist also reminds us that no one can be a follower of the Lord without reaching out to the needy, to the helpless.

At the Annual National Prayer Breakfast on February 2, 1984, Ronald Reagan, the former president of the United States, told that old story of "the little monk," Telemachus, a martyr whose self-sacrificial commitment to Christian ideals opened the blind eyes and deaf ears of the Romans and their fifth century Christian Emperor Honorius. According to the story, this Turkish monk was led by an inner voice to go to Rome in order to stop the cruel and inhuman gladiatorial fights between slaves. He followed the crowds to the Coliseum where two gladiators were fighting. He jumped into the arena and tried to stop them, shouting, "In the name of Christ, hold back!" The gladiators stopped, but the spectators became indignant.

A group of them rushed into the field and beat Telemachus to death. When the crowd saw the brave little monk lying dead in a pool of blood, they fell silent, leaving the stadium, one by one. Three days

later, because of Telemachus' heroic sacrifice of his own life, the Emperor decreed an end to the games. Yes! The little monk became the voice of the voiceless.

And that is exactly what Jesus is asking each of us today, that is: “to open our ears to hear the word of God, to open our eyes to be aware of the suffering and pain of those around us, to allow the Holy Spirit to loosen our tongues in order to praise and worship God, and to pray for the courage to become the voice of the voiceless, conveying the Good News of God’s love and salvation to others.

Now, there is a situation that is even worse than being physically deaf and dumb. And that is spiritual deafness and dumbness. People who are spiritually deaf and dumb are unable to speak to God in prayer, and they are unable to hear God in the depths of their hearts. And how do we deal with it?

Today’s Gospel has a clear answer on that. It would say that we must ask Jesus to do for us what He did for the man in the Gospel. Recall what happened when he was brought to Jesus for healing: Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd, put his fingers in his ears and touched his tongue. Then he said to the man: “*Ephphatha*” which means “Be opened”. Mark concludes by saying: “At once the man was able to hear

and his speech impediment was removed, and he began to talk without any trouble.

Yes, 'to be healed of our spiritual deafness and dumbness, we must turn to Jesus, as the man in the Gospel did'.

We must break away from the crowd. We must go off alone with Jesus and spend time with Him in prayer. Concretely, this means we ought to set aside some time each day to be with Jesus. And when we do that, God will give us the grace, the strength to become the voice of the voiceless.

Mother Teresa who spent her entire life for the poor, the homeless, the hungry, the marginalized, the rejects of the society was once asked how many convents she had around the world, and her answer was very simple, yet touching. She said: "We have 584 tabernacles." She knew that without the Presence of Jesus, the work of the Sisters would be impossible. And so, she used to insist with her sisters thus: "My dear sisters, we shall be spending two hours a day at sunrise and sunset in adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. It is through the Presence of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament that the life of Mother Teresa was transformed, and today her life reminds everyone of the

compassionate love of Jesus. Yes! We need to sit at the feet of Jesus to become truly effective in becoming the voice of those who cannot even speak plainly or fearlessly about their concerns.

Well! Dear friends, as we continue the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, let us pray that we may see and hear directly from the heart, that we may anticipate the needs of other people instead of being asked, much less begged. God calls each of one of us to make a difference in this world.

This Parish Community has great resources. And we can make, as we have been making, a tremendous difference in the lives of the needy. God wants nothing less. Let us not be afraid. Let us go the extra mile, open our ears and our eyes, help those in need and rejoice in the Lord's presence. God bless you all, **Amen.**