

Donnybrook

5 September 2021

Welcome

Very few of us have been to a baptism recently. You may, however, remember a gesture and short prayer just after the pouring of the water. The minister touches the ears and the mouth of the baby and says the following words:

The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen.

The name of the prayer is taken from today's Gospel: the Ephphatha Prayer.

Topic

That prayer was said over each one of us; we are that baby and we are the man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech.

Steps

The gospel story

A comment on the story itself may help. The man is deaf and has an impediment in his speech. It is not that he is mute, unable to speak, but rather he has never really heard anyone speak and as a result it is hard for him to communicate. This may well be a story going back to Jesus' own time; nevertheless, Mark in his Gospel has a deeper purpose, indicated in his peculiar geography. The Decapolis region is south east of Tyre, but Jesus takes a route north to Sidon. It would be like going from Dublin to Rosslare via Balbriggan! By Mark's time, it is likely that some of the communities he wrote for were in Syria, specifically in Sidon. So, the story is symbolic, part of the outreach beyond Judaism to non-Jews, the Gentiles. Our story is about the opening the ears of anyone to hear the Good News, then and now.

Hearing

We can ask ourselves: have my ears been opened to hear the Good News? There are lots of blocks. As we know today, it can be hard to find the truth about any situation, even though we live in a time of news overload. We could begin to think that all truth is relative. A cultural block is the reduction of the Good News to good advice. Another block for us today is we have not really been trained in listening to Scripture, although substantial readings are proclaimed every Sunday.

The Word of God and Lectio Divina

Still, every Sunday the Word of God is proclaimed and we are called to listen to that word and draw life from it. One of the most popular ways of listening to Scripture today is called *Lectio Divina*. It means paying attention with mind and heart – my experience can open up the Word and the Word can shed light on my experience. The foundational Good News is not good advice, but Jesus' resurrection, the "yes" of God to us all.

Speaking

In our Gospel story, the healing of the man's impediment is a direct result of the gift of hearing. Because he can now hear clearly, he is able to speak clearly. We are not simply hearers of the Word but also people called to speak the word, to proclaim the Good News. Again, there are lots of blocks. With all that has happened in church, we tend to be quiet about our deepest convictions. In any case, the first person we need to talk to is ourselves: what do I believe? Why do I believe it? What difference does it make? Only then can we take up the challenge of 1 Peter 3:15:

But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. (1 Peter 3:15 NET)

If a grandchild or family member or friend asks you about your faith, it should be possible to share it quietly, sincerely and deeply. But from time to time, an opening occurs, when a word or two may make all the difference.

Conclusion

When Mark retold the story of the deaf man who could not speak, he had in mind more than an individual, fortunate healing. We are all to some degree deaf, with an impediment in our speech. At another level, we are all called to become hearers of the Word and proclaimers. Then the prayer said over us at our baptism will begin to take effect:

The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen.