

Learning to Hear and Speak Again

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The God we believe in is the God who fulfills promises. For example, in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, God promises a day when the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap for joy, and the mute will sing. In today's gospel we see the fulfillment of that promise when Jesus opens the ears of a man who cannot hear and restores his speech. But the promises of God are never exhausted; for as soon as they are fulfilled, they spill over into new and greater promises. Thus the fulfillment of God's promise in Christ leads to new promises for us even today.

Consider the situation of the man in today's gospel. He could not hear the sounds of nature or the words of the human voice. He could not hear the voice of Jesus; he could not hear the Word of God. He could not praise God with his lips or his tongue. But when Jesus put his finger in the man's ears and touched his tongue, the man could hear and speak. He could hear the voice of Jesus; for the first time he could praise God with his lips.

Now consider our own situation. We listen, but we rarely hear the Word of God. We listen, and all we hear are the dissident sounds of the world about us. But we rarely hear the Word of God. And because we fail to hear God's Word, it becomes difficult for us to praise God with our lips. For how can we praise God with our lips if we cannot hear God's Word? How can we praise God with our tongue, if we cannot hear the Word of Life? And so we are like the deaf man in today's gospel whose ears needed to be opened and whose tongue needed to be untied.

Two weeks ago, I spoke about the challenge we face in reaching out to those who have left us. After that homily, so many of you asked me how we can do this. How can we communicate the gospel to our brothers and sisters in Christ who no longer share the Eucharistic with us? While there are many things we can do, and I will talk about them, I will make one suggestion that arises from today's gospel.

To reach out to others, we must first hear the life-giving Word of God anew. *To reach out to others*, we need to set aside all of those dissident voices that prevent us from hearing God's Word. *To reach out to others* we need to hear the Word of God in a way that will transform our lives so that others will want to imitate us. *When we hear the Word of God in this way*, we can praise God with lips

and our tongue. *When we hear the Word of God in this way*, we have the courage to proclaim our faith with our lips. *When we hear the Word of God in this way*, we have a burning desire to reach out to those who have left us.

But here is the problem. In addition to being hard of hearing, we are timid and tongue-tied. We are afraid and embarrassed to speak about the new life that we have in Christ because we have been told that we are not to talk about religion; and so we are silent. *But I am not talking about religion*; I am talking about the life of God's Spirit that we enjoy in Christ Jesus. *I am not talking about religion*, I am talking about what St. Paul' calls the "newness of life" that we enjoy in Christ. *I am not talking about religion*; I am talking about **the Holy Spirit who is the echo of God's joy in our heart**. *I am not talking about religion*; I am talking about the fullness of life in God's Spirit.

If we witness to the joy of our Christian life then others will return. *If we testify* to the newness of life that is ours in Jesus Christ then others will return. *If we proclaim* the Word we have heard, then others will return. But we are like the tongue-tied man of today's gospel who could not hear. And so we wait for God's promise to be fulfilled in our own life. We wait for our ears to be opened and for our tongues to be loosened so that we can hear and praise God anew.

In a few moments, we will receive the Eucharist and enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. We will receive the Eucharist and experience the newness of life that is ours in Jesus Christ. As we receive this sacrament, we ask God to open our ears to hear the Word anew so that we may praise God with our lips and call others to the newness life in Christ that we enjoy. We pray, "Come Holy Spirit, Come into our hearts."