

***Jesus thinks I'm real***

*Homily for September 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 2021  
23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time*

The Bible has a lot to say about how we use our tongues and our ears. Ears and tongues are on centre stage today in the story of the mute deaf man. We will turn to our appointed Gospel in a minute, but I want for now to refer to two other verses, not from our readings for today.

The first is from Colossians 4:6 where St. Paul writes:

***Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,***

Now think about this with me. Speech that is gracious are words that gift another person, this is what the word grace means, “gift”. So, we want to ask ourselves: The way I have spoken to my spouse, my children, my siblings, friends, and colleagues, the way I have indeed spoken to myself, have my words been gracious? That is, have they been a gift to the other, a gift to me? I know how easy it is for me, either on my lips or in my heart to be ungracious in my speech, with words that are critical, judgmental, condemnatory, irritable, and resentful. Paul goes on to say that our words are also to be seasoned with salt. What does this mean? In the world of Paul’s time salt was both a preservative and an accent, to bring out the flavours of food, just like today. Paul says our speech is also to preserve relationships in a healthy way and enhance them. How often words can be used in ways that contradicts the Word of God. Words that wound and contaminate relationships, and rather than enhancing them, embitter them.

If Paul’s verse is on how we use the tongue, St. James directs on the use of our ears.

***Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to answer.***

To cultivate gracious speech is associated with patient listening. How easy it is again for me to want to jump in and interrupt the other, especially those closest to me; or in my mind and heart not really listen to what is being said, because I am wanting to be heard. But says, James, we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to answer.

So again, let me ask you, how have you listened this week, to your spouse, your children, your siblings, friends, and colleagues. How have you listened to God in your own heart? And how have you listened to yourself?

A story is told of a family that went into a restaurant. The waitress walked up and, looking at the young boy, said: What will be it? The boy eagerly shouted back: I'll take a hamburger, French fries, and a chocolate shake. The mother immediately interrupted: Oh, that's not what he wants. He'll take the roast beef, a baked potato, and a glass of milk. Much to the surprise of both the mother and the boy, the waitress completely ignored her and again asked the boy: And what do you want on that hamburger? The boy shouted back: ketchup, lots of ketchup. And what kind of shake? Make it chocolate. The boy then turned to his parents with a big smile on his face and said:

***“Say, ain't she something. She thinks that I'm real”***

How the man in today's Gospel experienced the same thing when Jesus touched his ears and opened his lips so he could speak. Here was a man who in a society where hearing was so important, 1<sup>st</sup> century society was more auditory, ours is more visual. His whole life was characterized by impairment in hearing and speaking. And here comes Jesus, and for the first time in his life, he is seen, and heard, which allows him to hear and find his voice.

How many of us, are like the deaf and mute man? Yes, we can hear and speak but so often we have felt invisible and in turn it has influenced us, so we don't really listen and hear the other person. If we are honest we have had a hearing and speech impediment.

On the day of our Gospel story that man left, saying:

*Ain't that Jesus something, he thinks I am real.*

What happened so this man., what did the boy in the restaurant experience? Genuine respect and positive touch made all the difference. Hear again these words from the Gospel:

***<sup>33</sup> He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." <sup>35</sup> And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly***

Now by taking him aside privately Jesus was respecting this man's dignity. By touching his ears, he was acknowledging this man with the sense that was active for him, his touch. This was Jesus' way of saying I hear you and I see you. What about the spittle. This is what it means. For a Jewish person saliva was a bodily fluid that would not be readily shared, especially with someone whose mouth was so to speak unclean, like the mute. But here is what happens, Jesus' spittle and Jesus' words give grace to the man who hears, and we are told the man's tongue was released and he spoke plainly. In the Greek the word for "release" would be better translated, "unshackled".

What does this all mean for us. When we learn to listen carefully to others and speak graciously into the lives of others our lives can be radically changed and we will be Jesus to the other person. Think about it, with a single grace-filled word, the word the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled. A world that had always existed suddenly became real to this man, like the desert coming to life.! All his life he had seen people talking and all that he could do was mimic them. Now, for the first time, he heard people speaking. All his life he had seen people working in the marketplace and seen the children playing. Now, for the first time, he heard people bartering and he heard the children's laughter and cries of joy.

So, hear is the application of Paul's teachings, James' words on listening and the Lord's example.

***If you once start really hearing people, they are suddenly going to become real to you!***

May we be renewed and inspired today to choose to listen patiently and speak graciously. Husbands and wives, parents and children, church members, and our divided society accentuated with the tensions between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated, God's word declares listen

caringly and speak graciously. It's not always easy but when we stop trying, we stop being a family. Jesus placed his hands on this man's ears and spoke: Ephphatha--be opened. And today we are invited to ask for the Holy Spirit to place his hands on our ears and speak the words be opened. Then and only then will we be able to hear and speak. Then we too can shout with affirmation, as did the crowd that day: This man Jesus does all things well. He even makes the deaf to hear.

*Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to answer.*

*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,*