

Homily for Trinity XIV – He has done all things well - 2021

On the face of it, today's short gospel account of the healing of a man who was deaf and who had a speech impediment seems all straightforward. Jesus had returned to Decapolis, a region immediately south east of the Sea of Galilee. He had healed many there on an earlier occasion. Presumably the man was brought to Jesus by family or friends who asked Jesus to lay his hands upon him.

We are given a glimpse of Our Lord's kindness and sensitivity in the words... *'He took him aside from the crowd and all by himself.'* Jesus was not going to deal with the man as though he were a mere case to be treated or as some sort of opportunity to impress the gathered crowd either. Rather he saw the man as an individual with a special need and a special problem and with tender consideration he dealt with the unfortunate man in a way that spared his feelings. Firstly, Jesus took him aside. Secondly he touched his ears. Thirdly he touched his tongue with spittle and finally he uttered one word ... *'ephphatha'* ...which means... *'be opened!'* The man's ears were opened forthwith, that is, he could hear again. His tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly.

Very little else can be said, with any certainty, about the miracle except that the man was most likely not deaf from birth, because, when his tongue was loosened, he was able to speak clearly straight away. Matthew Tyndale in his Bible Commentary spoke of the man as having a stammer. Despite our Lord's injunction that they should tell nobody, the story of what Jesus had done was proclaimed far and wide. The more Jesus asked that nobody be told, the more the amazing cure was proclaimed. There is no surprise about that, especially as Mark writes that everyone was *'astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well.'*

Today, in our society, a person who has gone deaf would first go to an Audiologist for diagnosis and treatment and a man with a speech impediment would likewise first be treated by a Speech Therapist. That makes it more difficult for us to come to terms with the miracle we have heard proclaimed today and take it to heart,

as in our minds the man's deafness and speech defect are understood as conditions that are mostly likely able to be treated by well trained medical specialists.

I'm mindful of my grandfather's suggestion about how to personalise the stories of the gospel. His advice was put yourself in the scene as one of those present and apply the words to yourself. Doing that gives us two options in today's gospel. Make yourself the deaf man with a speech impediment or make yourself one of the crowd. Let's briefly consider both.

Firstly, put ourselves into the shoes of the man who was deaf and who had a speech impediment. Immediately I would think to myself... well, I'm not deaf and I don't have a speech impediment either, although I have to admit my faculty of hearing is no longer perfect. I'm sure my grandfather would say... 'and what about spiritual deafness, James?' Is it possible that you have become one of those who our Lord speaks of in his explanation of the meaning of the Parable of the Sower when he says (See Mark 4:12)... they '*see but never perceive and hear but never understand?*' In other words they are spiritually blind, spiritually deaf and as good as spiritually dead because they refuse to see and hear!

Now there's a wake up call that may well apply to many or even most of us. Possibly all of us. Is it possible that I have, you have, we have, to all intents and purposes given up even hearing? Hearing what you ask? The answer comes straightaway and it very often shames us...Have I, to all intents and purposes, given up hearing the voice of the risen Lord Jesus Christ? Is his voice ever able to break in, as it were...to the recesses of my heart and mind?

How do we hear the voice of the Lord? Firstly, by reading the gospels because there Jesus Christ speaks to us. If we have put the good habit of daily Bible reading aside, or never even formed it, we are not making much room for the Lord to speak to us. If we've become an irregular or sporadic worshipper, we have all but given up on hearing Jesus speak at all. Because, if that's the case, it's as good as a certainty that our Bible remains closed and gathering dust in the house somewhere. And it's better

than an even chance that in our sporadic church attendance, we won't be focused on Jesus speaking to us via the proclamation of his word in the church.

So it definitely can be the case that we are the deaf man in the gospel desperately needing Jesus to take us aside, to lay his hands upon us and to open our ears that we might actually hear his voice anew. Imagine a church, if you will, where weekly worship was the overwhelming norm and daily Bible reading was the norm. If nothing else it would be a church that was opened, opened to the power of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit. It would be a church where Jesus was upon everybody's lips for a start and that brings me to the second option in the process of placing ourselves into the narrative of today's gospel. We could be one of the crowd that witnessed an event so amazing they couldn't keep quiet about it.

If that was the case, we would say goodbye for ever to a shrinking-violet, lukewarm, half-hearted sort of Christian faith and Church that is neither hot nor cold. Because we too would, quite literally, be astonished by the mighty works that Jesus performs and quite unable to hold ourselves back in proclaiming that *'He has done all things well'*... as is proven beyond all doubt in the wonders of His love; the beauty of His grace; the power of His Resurrection, and the joy of being a member of the household of faith.