

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

27 August, Anno Domini 2023

St. Mark 7:31-37

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Confessors of Christ,

In the healing of the deaf mute before us today, we see the inseparable connection between hearing and speaking. And most especially do we see that Jesus alone is able to open our ears to hear His Word and our mouths to speak rightly of Him. It is essential that we daily remember that right faith and right speaking come by hearing and hearing comes by the Word of Christ. You cannot know or speak of Christ apart from His Word.

The man's speech in today's Gospel was impeded because he couldn't hear what rightly ordered speech sounds like. He was forced to try to figure it out on his own which left him making sounds no one could understand. If we are to speak rightly, we must first listen. That should seem pretty self-evident. After all, don't children have to first hear the words of grown ups before they are able to start speaking them on their own? Don't they have to be taught how to put the letters and words and sentences together? It's funny listening to children as they are trying figure out language. They put words together that are completely unrelated and we find it amusing.

It's really no different for us as children of our heavenly Father. We aren't born knowing the language of heaven. The only language we are born knowing is that of the devil's kingdom - selfish demands, prideful boasting, rude and perverted joking, lying - language that is wholly unfitting for the

children of light. The truth doesn't come naturally to us. We have to learn it. Someone must teach it to us. This is what preaching and teaching is all about - teaching the language and grammar of the true Christian faith so that we may speak rightly and plainly about who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us in Christ. Parents and heads of the house, this is your single greatest responsibility for those under your charge - teaching them to speak rightly about all things according to the Word of God. And this speaking has life and death consequences - eternal life and death. God wants us to rightly confess our sin so that we may rightly believe and confess our salvation. That is why God speaks. He speaks so that we may hear and by hearing be saved.

But the things of God are foolishness to the natural man because it is the Spirit who discerns them, the Spirit given by water and and by Word. Ears stopped up by sin and greed produce only tongues that speak falsehood about God. Indeed, such tongues only curse God and speak falsely of Him, give Him false names, attribute to Him false works, and give His glory to others. Our ears must be first opened by the Word of Jesus so that we may hear His voice and His voice alone as truth. Then, and only then, having our ears opened by the command of Christ "Ephphathah!", receiving the Holy Spirit in the waters of Holy Baptism, we may finally hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and speak rightly of Him.

We are born knowing the language of selfishness and desire. We are born wanting to talk about "me" and what I want. We are born knowing Satan's language filled with words of pride and arrogance, gloating, and self-preservation. Our ears are filled with the perverted and deceiving words of our demonic father and the foolish wisdom of his world. That isn't the language of God. That is the language of death and pain and misery. And

that is the language that our sinful flesh finds comfortable and natural and satisfying. And when that is what we are listening to, when that is what we fill our ears with then our speech will be impeded and we will be filled with false beliefs and false speaking. Repent.

God must speak if we are to be saved and that is exactly what He does. He provided the preaching of the prophets and the apostles. He caused that preaching to be written down for us in Holy Scripture. He continues to provide for the preaching and teaching of His Word - so that we might hear Him. It is by that hearing that we are brought to believe. And then by believing what we have heard, we confess in our hearts and with our lips that the God of heaven and earth who has made us and against whom we have grievously sinned, has sent His beloved and only-begotten Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, to proclaim to us the love and mercy of God and set us free from eternal judgment.

God's speaking is the whole beginning and content of our faith - not our speaking, not our declarations of love for God or our decisions. God reveals to us who He is and all that He has done and we say "Amen". Our whole life as Christians is a cycle of hearing God speak and then speaking back to Him what He said, thereby glorifying His Name and proclaiming Him to be true. That is beauty of the Church's liturgy - it is almost entirely God's own Word, verbatim, on the mouths of God's people. We can be certain that not only what we are saying is true, but it is pleasing to God. The fountain and source of Christian prayer is what God has said and promised. Truth does not come from within us because it can't. No amount of human wisdom will ever attain to heavenly wisdom. It is clouded and perverted by sin. On our own we are completely devoid of the truth that saves. We need to hear the Word of God continually so that we may be led in the way of truth and

guarded against all of the falsehoods that daily assault our ears, hearts, and minds.

This is also why as Christians we need to give careful consideration to what we are listening to, what has access to our ears. We've all heard the saying "Garbage in; garbage out." And that is absolutely true, especially when it comes to eternal truths because the truths of Scripture are contrary to everything we hear in the world. There has been a trend in recent decades for Christians to try to play tough when it comes to foul language, crude jokes, listening to and watching things that are filled with inappropriate and evil content, even listening to false doctrine, under the guise of Christian freedom. We imagine that we are such strong Christians that these things can't hurt us and maybe the world will like Christianity more if we show them that we're okay with these things, that we're cool too. We shouldn't be either for ourselves or for our children. And the past few years should have made it abundantly clear that the unbelieving world is coming after your children - in the classroom and online. They make no bones about it. They do not want you or your children to be Christians.

Children of God, the ears that God gave you should only listen to things that are true and honorable and just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. The mouth God gave you is for prayer, for confessing the works of God, for speaking the truth, for comforting, and for teaching. God has graciously opened your ears that were stopped up with evil - why would we willingly go back and fill them up with evil? Should the mouth that has received the Body and Blood of Christ also be filled with filthy, foolish talk or gossip or foul language, or disrespect? We shouldn't laugh it off when someone takes the precious name of our Lord and Savior in vain. We should be offended by that and let them know that. We shouldn't laugh at or make

crude jokes. We shouldn't give ANY of our attention to those who want to assault us with things that are inappropriate, immodest, unholy, and contrary to God's Word. Those things shouldn't be entertaining to us. Not a single one of us can watch or read or listen to such things without being affected by them. If you believe that, you are lying to yourself and denying what God teaches about your flesh in Holy Scripture. Nor should it be our goal to be able to watch these things without being affected. We should be scandalized by vulgar language, immodest dress and behavior, and false teaching. And, yes, that will mean some very difficult and uncomfortable choices will have to be made. Friends and family may be offended and even lost. Children will be upset with their parents who in love restrict their access to the sewer of the internet. Parents, that you means you as well should restrict your own access to that sewer. If it is bad for your children, it is bad for you too.

Contrary to what the world tells you, you don't need these things. You aren't missing out on anything when you don't have them. It may feel that way at first, but, the truth is that you will have gained so much time to engage in truly wonderful, God-pleasing, and edifying things that you will wonder why you didn't take out this garbage sooner. You will most likely find yourself feeling less anxious. less depressed, and less angry. In their place, take up prayer and daily meditation on the Scriptures. Go on walks and play games with your family. Visit the sick and shut-ins. Volunteer in your community. Invite your neighbors over for drinks and then invite them join you at church. Sing the beautiful hymns of the faith. Pray the psalter. Memorize Scripture. When you fill your ears with true and beautiful things, true and beautiful things will come pouring out of your mouths and your hearts will be filled the comfort and peace of Christ even when the troubles of this life are all around you.

Dear Christian, Christ Jesus has caused the saving truth to be proclaimed into your ears. By His Word and according to His gracious will your ears have been opened so that you can hear Him, the Good Shepherd who calls you by Name, who absolves you of your sins, who speaks divine truth against the world's demonic lies. He has loosed your tongue that now from your mouth the divine word might be heard in the world as you gladly and boldly confess His Name before men. Let us not fill our ears or mouths again with the devil's poisonous lies. Let us daily fill our ears with the Word of God which does all things well, beautifully, including saving us poor wretched sinners. God grant that we may zealously and rightly proclaim His Name throughout the world, filling the ears of our fellow man with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.