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Trinity 12

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In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus heals another Gentile, showing that He is the Savior of the world and not simply the Jewish nation. They bring Jesus a man who is deaf and had a speech impediment, and beg Jesus to simply lay His hand on the man. Jesus does heal him and utters the word, *Ephphatha*. At this command, the man's ears are opened, and he speaks plainly. From this lesson, we see that Christ will help us. We will be tormented and wrongfully accused in this world, as Isaiah writes; but Christ intercedes and will finally bring us to the new heavens and new earth.

The deaf man had no hope of hearing. He could see the birds fluttering in the air, but he could not hear their sweet song. He could perceive the tree branches swaying in the wind but not the sound of the rustling leaves. He could grasp his mother's face, but not the gentleness in her voice. Apart from Christ, we are this man. There is a sweeter side to things that can only be perceived once our ears are unplugged. One cannot perceive the sweet music of God's grace, unless God Himself opens our ears to it, as Christ did for the deaf man. We are lost, deaf, dumb, and cannot rightly understand the world or even ourselves, unless we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus put His fingers in the deaf man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. This is a good lesson to us all, in that Jesus does not shirk ceremony. He could have simply spoken the word for healing, and the man would have been healed. But instead, Christ engages in ceremony. Crossing yourself, kneeling at the altar or in prayer at home, these are good ceremonies to do. Christ intercedes for us; fathers, do so for your families. Lead your families in devotions; mothers, pray the Lord's Prayer at bedtime with the kids. Don't shirk good ceremonies.

Then Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed. This phrase, "looking up to heaven," St. Mark uses when Jesus feeds the five thousand. It conveys Christ praying to His Father. It is Him interceding for us as our Advocate. Jesus never acts apart from His Father. Then Jesus sighed or groaned. The Bible tells us Jesus did this often. It means an involuntary groan or grunt, like from a wounded person. It indicates sorrow or suffering from sin. Now Christ was no sinner, but it did cost Him to remove and bear our sin. And so, Christ, fully Man, groans in pain. There is effort involved in the restoration of creation and in bearing sin. We must always keep in mind that our sin is costly. This sigh communicates that Jesus is committing Himself to the path of the cross, to make the ultimate intercession for us by hanging on a cursed tree in our stead.

At the word of *Ephphatha*, "Be opened," the man hears. We have spiritual hearing at the very same word. It's spoken at our Baptism, ~~as we saw earlier this morning~~. When *epphatha* is pronounced, Christ is commanding that the one being baptized would be opened to the sweeter

side of things, that he believe in Christ, and that he know His grace. As the Psalmist writes, “For He spoke, and it came to be.” And so, it is as Christ says. The scene of the deaf man becoming able to hear is a scene of Holy Baptism. There’s the Word of God, there’s the water in the spittle, and there’s a beginning. Our ears and minds become unclogged at the Word of God. For without God’s Word in our lives, we are spiritually dead. What evil has shut, God’s Word bursts open.

Having been opened by the Holy Spirit, the tongue being released, we are able to speak plainly. That is to say, we can now rightly praise and glorify His name. We can give a good confession. Imagine the kinds of conversations that Adam and Eve had prior to the Fall. In the truest sense, this is speaking plainly, or rightly. The ears are opened to faith, then the tongue is released to make a good confession.

Despite all this, the healing doesn’t fix our deepest problems. The Christian still longs to be with Christ in His Kingdom. For this is a troubled world and is getting more troubled by the hour. We long for the troubles, the pain, the deception, and false narratives to be put to rest. Isaiah, in today’s Old Testament lesson, describes a particular burden of the Church in our age. He writes that scoffers will cease, “and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off, who by a word make a man out to be an offender ... and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.” Doesn’t that describe today?

Evildoers lie in wait to trap the innocent with their snares, seeking to make a man an offender by a word, that is, simply with an accusation. They submit empty pleas against the innocent, and quite often their baseless claims are upheld. They deny the actual character and actions of men and see nothing but a group which is often an accident of birth. Every member of this arbitrary group is then held accountable for all that anyone in that group has ever done. Those slanderers and bigots, those purveyors of hate, says Isaiah, will be brought to nothing. Indeed, the meek will inherit the earth, Lebanon will be turned into a fruitful field, the deaf will hear, and the blind will see. Sin, illness, deformities, empty accusations will cease to exist; and the meek will obtain fresh joy in the Lord. It will be beyond expression, but we have to wait.

So, we wait, and we try to do it patiently. We wait for the Day of the Lord or for our own death, whichever comes first. But while we’re still here in this world, we remember that Christ our Lord makes intercession for us and still advocates for us even now. He promises to provide for us while we’re still here, and this we can be certain of.

So, Lord, while we wait, help us to know that You will provide for us and will continue to make intercession for us. You promise to return, O Lord. Well then hurry up and get to it, because we’re tired, and we want to come home.

In Jesus Name. Amen.