

Homily for the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 8-9, 2018

Readings: Isaiah 35:4-7A; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

It's that time of the year. Young people are headed back to school. Some, like my beloved grandson, are off to a whole new world as college freshmen. Eager to explore and discover, yet filled with questions. Maybe even apprehensions.

In today's Gospel, Jesus enters a whole new world. The Decapolis. A Gentile world, outside Israel. But not before he's just learned something new, something big, from a *Gentile*: A Syrophoenician woman, whose daughter he's just healed. He's come to her neighborhood because he needs time off. Time away! He's had enough! Enough rejection by his own family. Enough rejection by some religious leaders who hound him for not following all their religious rules.

But *this* woman simply will not leave him alone, not until he heals her daughter. For she knows what he's about to learn: *She's* part of his family, too! So is her daughter. Hmmm. *Maybe* he should stay outside Israel for a bit. So, off he goes, to the Decapolis. And wouldn't you know. *Other* people have heard of God's power at work in him, too. *Other* people bring him a friend, who's deaf and unable to speak plainly. Jesus, careful not to show off, takes the man aside by himself. Eyes raised to heaven, he commands, "Ephphatha!" Open up! The man is healed!

These days many of us may feel as though *we're* in a whole new world. A strange, difficult, painful world. In Church. And in our country. A world where sexual abuse by some priests isn't behind us, after all. Where the bodies and souls of young people have been mortally bruised and broken. Where silencing, cover up, and scapegoating have been longstanding responses by too many church officials. Where people—finally—are starting to demand that the system change. They are questioning the clericalism that produces leaders who will protect the rotting system, rather than the people they are meant to serve.

And we live in a world where some high level government officials behave like bullies, dividing people rather than bringing them together. Where do we fit in such a world? What's to be done? Where's *our* place in the Gospel we cherish?

As I walked around in today's story, I imagined us to be the people. Friends of the one who needs healing. Friends who know they can count on Jesus for this healing. For they've heard the stories of his great power. From a distance they can hear Jesus' command. "Ephphatha!" Open up!

Yes, we *are* the People of God. The Church! The baptized followers of Jesus. We, too, hear his command—"Ephphatha!" Open up! Break out of all the narrow confines we have accepted. Open up our hearts to the people around us, to the world around us! Open up our ears to children's wailing. Open up our hands to do the work that God placed in them. Open up our mouths to speak the truth of God, with courage and without fear.

Speak plainly, only by the power of God's love, for this new world demands that we overcome any fear that would silence us.

Speak plainly, that the abuse and corruption of some Church leaders must end. Right here and right now! No more passing sick priests from one place to another. No more clericalism. No! For they have mortally wounded so many young people, even the entire Body of Christ. And betrayed all the good priests who are doing their best to live out their sacred promises made to God.

Speak plainly, that all people —*all people*—are worthy of dignity and respect. For all are made in God's image. Immigrants simply aching to build a better life for themselves and their children. Children scarred for life by war, wherever in the world they are to be found—in Yemen, in camps that house the Rohingya survivors of the Myanmar's army genocide. In camps right here in this country, where they are still separated from their parents by cruel policy and actions.

Speak plainly, that *all people* are beloved of God. Gifted by God as God sees fit. Women, as well as men. Gay people as well as straight, made in God's image to do whatever work God has called them to do. Yes, even called to lead people in prayer, as God chooses.

Speak plainly and act upon what we speak. According to our gifts. With others of like mind, for we cannot do this alone. Then, and only then, can we more truly

become the Church of Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, can our strange, difficult, and painful world be slowly transformed into the world that God has in mind for us. A world of healing. A world where we share the unfathomable love of God with others, in compassion and setting things right. The world God means for us to inhabit, including my beloved grandson.