

THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Is 35:4-7; Ps 146:7,8-9,9-10; Jas 2:1-5; Mk 7:31-37

PLAIN HEARING, PLAIN SPEAKING

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, September 8, 2018, 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 9, 8:30 a.m.

The way that little children learn to speak is an amazing phenomenon.

Even the littlest children are very smart and are very adept at imitating sounds.

At the beginning,

almost every sound a little child makes
is in imitation of their parents.

Mom says, pointing at herself, “Mommy.”

Dad says, pointing at himself, “Daddy.”

Nose, eyes, ears.

The ability to speak is directly related to the ability to hear.

Children say what they hear.

A small child listens to mom or dad count: 1, 2, 3;

and they learn how to count, and eventually the child can say: 1, 2, 3.

Mom or dad may teach the colors: white, green, gold – purple!

and the child will say: white, green, gold – purple!

I’d bet that a little child could learn to say SKOL right away.

The ability to speak is directly related to the ability to hear,

but this can be really embarrassing with small children.

I don’t know if you have ever witnessed this.

I have experienced this several times.

So there are some guests over for dinner.

A little child, maybe 2 ½, spills the milk,

and impulsively says, “Oh s h __ !”

Often the adults will giggle.

Sometimes to relieve the surprise, someone will say, “Oh, wasn’t that cute?”

But it was not cute!

Not from two or three year old.

Kids repeat what they’ve heard,

and mom and dad have nowhere to hide,

and the parents are embarrassed – at least. I hope so.

Hearing and speech are interrelated.

If a person hears well, the person speaks well.

If a person hears bad things, the person often speaks bad things.

So it was with the deaf mute that Jesus encountered in the gospel.

St. Mark tells us that he was a “deaf man with a speech impediment” (Mk 7:32).

If a person has a speech impediment,

it means that the person is able to speak, at least a little,

but is not able to speak correctly, properly.

If the man is able to speak with an impediment,

it means that he is able to hear something, a little bit,

that he is partially deaf,

and that what he hears is garbled.

Remember the rule: the ability to speak is directly related to the ability to hear.

If a person hears well, the person will be able to speak well.

So along comes Jesus,

and very kindly, not to embarrass the man with the disability,

Jesus took the man with the disability off to the side by himself.

When Jesus performed the cure,

please notice the order that he did it (Mk 7:33).

Jesus put his finger in the man’s ear first.

Jesus touched the man’s tongue second.

Healing starts with hearing, and then proceeds to speaking.

After Jesus offered his prayer, and after the man was cured,

the man “spoke plainly” (Mk 7:35b).

What was the man’s “plain speech”?

The first words that the man heard plainly were the words of Jesus.

Jesus was a plain talker.

He spoke the truth.

He spoke with conviction.

He spoke kindly and respectfully.

The whole idea of the cure was for the man to listen to Jesus.

The more a person listens to Jesus,

hopefully, the more the person will talk like him.

Plain speech is good speech, informative, wise, respectful speech!

Plain speech is upright, decent, honorable, and helpful.

It is pretty obvious that parents should speak properly around their children

because their children are going to imitate them,

and they want their children to speak properly.

Good hearing, good speaking.

I've heard "s word" from kids, and words that start with other letters, too.
It's not so good; it's speaking with an impediment.

Kids are one thing.
We adults are another.

Most of us can hear just fine,
but what we say can be dreadful.
Sometimes we speak with an impediment.

Our hearing problem is not necessarily the inability to hear,
but what we listen to.
Our hearing is impaired when we listen to
constant criticism and complaining,
gossip about other people,
mean comments, rude comments,
dirty jokes, foul language,
cursing and swearing, trash talk,
lousy programming on TV,
comedians whose routines are laced with obscenities,
the lyrics to nasty songs.
When we listen to this stuff,
and then we talk in these ways,
we have a speech impediment,
and we are not speaking plainly – like Jesus did.

God gave us our ears and the ability to hear.
Jesus wants us to use the gift well,
to speak plainly, without impediments.

Kids listen to their parents and imitate them.
Now that we are older,
the one to listen to is Jesus,
and for us to imitate him and to speak like he did.

If we are honest, every one of us here is partially deaf and has speech impediments,
because we have listened to bad things and spoken badly.
Like the man who was deaf with a speech impediment,
we all need to be cured.
Jesus had a soft spot in his heart on the man and his problems:
he took him aside and fixed his problem.
And Jesus has great compassion on you and me.
Even if we have listened to some bad things and said some bad things,
Jesus wants to cure us, so that we will be free of our impediments
and be able to speak plainly, in ways that are pleasing to Jesus.