

# EARS TO HEAR, TONGUES TO SPEAK

Mark 7:31-37

How can you tell a Christian from an unbeliever? It's not in the way they live. A Christian lives, eats, sleeps, and works like any other human being. They both sin. They both give to charity and help old ladies across the street. Outwardly they're the same. No, the only difference is in the *ears and tongue*. A Christian listens to God's Word. He has a tongue that gives God thanks and praise, glorifies His Son Jesus Christ, and speaks the truth. The unbeliever does *not* do this, but *despises* God's Word and *refuses* to call on the name of the Lord. So St. Paul says in today's Epistle, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Blessed are you, if your ears are eager to hear God's Word, and your tongues eager to speak His praise. For flesh and blood has not done this, but the Father who is in heaven. Like the deaf-mute in today's reading, you were brought to Jesus in your Baptism, where He opened your ears and loosed your tongue by the washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit. *You* didn't do this. You weren't *capable* of doing this, any more than the deaf-mute was capable of healing himself. But by *grace* you have been saved. You who were dead in your trespasses and sins, ears deaf to the truth of God and tongue tied down by the irons of evil, have been freed by the power of God in Christ Jesus, who has done all things well.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let us first go back and talk about how, in today's Gospel lesson,

## **The deaf hear and the mute speak.**

Long ago, Isaiah had prophesied (29:17-18),

Is it not yet a very little while  
until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,  
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?  
In that day the deaf shall hear  
the words of a book,  
and out of their gloom and darkness  
the eyes of the blind shall see.

This was a prophecy of the coming Messiah. When God's Anointed came, His Chosen One to save, there would be miracles: the deaf would hear, the blind would see. And don't miss that mention of Lebanon. Normally a dry, desertous region, Lebanon does see plenty of rain in December, when all the vegetation revives after a long, hot

summer. It also happens to be where Tyre and Sidon are located. You'll recall that Jesus only met the deaf-mute after returning from the region of Tyre and going through Sidon (Mark 7:31). This seemingly insignificant detail cues us into the fact that the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, as well as the winter rains of renewal, have come in Jesus.

"And they brought to Him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged Him to lay His hands on Him" (Mk. 7:32). Who are "they"? Friends, presumably, maybe family. Whoever they were, they believed that Christ could save this poor individual (one can only imagine what his life must have been like). They would not have brought him otherwise. Perhaps they'd heard what Jesus had done for the Syrophonician woman in the previous passage, curing her daughter of an unclean spirit (Mk. 7:24-30). Faith came through hearing, and here they were, their faith moved to this work of mercy and love.

"And taking him aside from the crowd privately, He put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue" (Mk. 7:33). He spoke to him in the best way He could: by *showing* Him what He was about to do.

"And looking up to heaven, He sighed" (Mk. 7:34a). Not a tired sigh, a sigh of exhaustion, but a sigh of anger, of frustration, even pain. Jesus sighed because of *sin*. He sighed because He saw what harm the devil had done in Paradise, deceiving Eve and seeing sin into the world through one man, on account of whom we are *all* by nature deaf and mute toward God. He sighed because of the sorrow and distress the devil *continues* to work throughout the world, and for which *we* sigh inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. It was not for this man's tongue and ears alone that Jesus sighed, but for *all* our tongues and ears.

"And [He] said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly" (Mk. 7:34b-35). Immediately. Jesus spoke, and at His speaking it was done. Like rain coming down to water the earth, the Word of God achieved its purpose. It still does. In the waters of Holy Baptism, in the preached and spoken Word, in the feast of His true body and blood, Jesus speaks His "Ephphatha" and turns dry, desertous hearts into a fruitful field. He opens the ears of the deaf to hear and loosens their tongues to let fly His praise. We sing it at the beginning Matins: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise." It *will*. Because it wouldn't otherwise. It would be sealed shut. No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). And the Holy Spirit is at work through the Word to make such a confession of the faith possible.

“And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more He charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak’” (Mk. 7:36-37). You can hardly blame them. How could they *not*? What did Jesus say to the Pharisees who told Him to rebuke His disciples for praising Him on His way into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Lk. 19:40). Praise is inevitable. It can’t be helped, not for those who have been given ears to hear and tongues to speak. Christians praise. It’s what we do. We hear what God has done for us in His Son, giving Him to die on a cross for our disobedience, and we give Him the glory and fame He deserves. He has done all things well.

Still,

### **Keep your tongues and ears.**

As in *guard* them. Your ears may be eager to hear God’s Word, and your tongues eager to speak His praise, but the devil and his company are just as eager to *stop* you. They don’t *want* you to hallow God’s name by a right confession, or to believe His Holy Word unto eternal life. Their plan and purpose is to deceive and mislead you into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice.

And guess what they use to do it? Your ears and tongue. These are gateways into your soul, and your enemy knows how to exploit them. It was with words that the serpent deceived the woman in the beginning. False prophets and teachers have always been a problem in the church. Paul laments in 2 Timothy 4, “A time will come when people will not endure sound teaching, but will set up teachers for themselves who scratch their ears.” How many youth have we lost to the false teaching of our age? It’s not *just* the youth of course, but I read this week that 87% of American teenagers now own a smartphone. Among those, non-school related screen time (streaming, games, social media) averages 7.7 hours per day.<sup>1</sup> That’s around 54 hours per week. How much time do they spend listening to God’s Word? One, maybe two hours per week? That’s *if* they go to church and Sunday School.

Now, I know some people like to say that technology is neutral, and that it “only matters how you use it,” but I’m telling you, those people have never been on TikTok! These things are designed and run by people who want to get into your mind and *change* it. They already have. But God gave you your ears. He bought them with a price. So before you let anything into this, and this goes for everyone, by the way, ask, “Is this good? Is this right? Does this glorify God? Or is it dangerous? Does it tempt me? Does it

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2785686>

teach something false?" Brothers and sisters, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about *these things*" (Phil. 4:8). Be deaf to everything else.

As for the tongue, James warns of its destructive power, saying, "How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness" (3:5-6). Have you ever noticed how many of the Ten Commandments have to do with the tongue? The Second, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God," means that "We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by God's name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." God has given us His name so that we can use it to *bless*. Just so, Luther says that we are to lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we *say* and do. "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place," writes Paul in Ephesians 5, "but instead let there be thanksgiving." We are to use our tongues to defend our neighbor, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. *Because* of who we are in Christ. *Because* our tongues have been untied. Because that is what's *fitting* for a baptized child of God. It'll be Advent soon, and as we sing in Evening Prayer, based on Psalm 141,

Set a watch before my mouth, O Lord,  
and guard the door of my lips.  
Let not my heart incline to any evil thing;  
let me not be occupied in wickedness with evildoers.

In other words, "Thy will be done." We have no power to hear and speak ourselves, but our hope is in *Christ*, who does all things well. What we spoiled through our disobedience, He has mended by His perfect obedience. And that we may share in His victory, He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, giving us faith to believe that He is risen and to inspire us to confess that He is Lord. We proclaim it *zealously*. How can we not? We are Christians! It's what we do! God grant us grace for Jesus' sake, that by *His* mercy and love we may ever have ears to hear and tongues to speak, to the glory of His holy name.

Amen.

*Soli Deo gloria*