

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday OT – (Year B) – September 9, 2018

IS 35:4-7A; PS 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10; JAS 2:1-5; MK 7:31-37

In the **Gospel of Luke**, Jesus said:

*Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three...* (Lk 12:51-52, NAB)

These are disturbing words, especially for those whose preferred “*Jesus*” is not the **sin-conquering Lion of Judah** depicted in the **Book of Revelation** (cf. Rev 5:5), but rather, a *soft-featured flower child* whose *outreach to the social outcasts* of his time—his **dinners with sinners**, his chat by a well with a **many-times-married mistress**, and his rescue of a **condemned adulteress** from her **stone-throwing executioners**—was a *tacit endorsement of their sinful behaviors*.

Jesus had these conversations with those who were **slaves to their sin**, *not* to **confirm their perversion**, but rather, to **call them to conversion!**

This is the crux of so much of the division in the Church today—namely, **what it looks like**—what it *means*—to **reach out to those enslaved by sin**.

**Jesus**—the **Incarnate Son of God**—did not come to destroy relationships in **families**, in the **Church**, or in **society**. But *his very presence* exposes the *thoughts and intentions of the heart* (cf. Heb 4:12), and makes clear the **battle lines in the spiritual war** in which we find ourselves embroiled...not to mention, on **which side of the battle line** we stand.

We read in the **1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of John’s Gospel**:

*The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God...* (Jn 1:9-12)

For *those who love God* (cf. Rom 8:28)...**Jesus**— *the Light of the World* (cf. Jn 8:12)—is *“lamp to [their] feet and a light to [their] path”* (cf. Ps 119:105) ... the path to **holiness**.

For those who love the *world*, Jesus is a **hindrance** to their **hedonism**, an **obstacle** to their **agendas**, a **condemnation** of their **corruption**—whether they are inside...or outside...the Church.

Later in the **Gospel of John**, we read:

*God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the [verdict], that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.* (Jn 3:17-21)

Jesus—*the Light of the World* (cf. Jn 8:12) does not **bring** this division ...**directly**. But his light *does expose the division* between those in the Church who **welcome** him...and those in the Church who *oppose* him...the division that is **already there**.

**Dr. Alice von Hildebrand**—the distinguished Catholic **theologian** and **philosopher**—identified this division in a 1998 speech entitled, *The Secular War on the Supernatural*. Her words 20 years ago seem **positively prophetic** as we find ourselves in another crisis in the Church today. She said:

**Now let us abolish the terms “conservative” or “liberal”, the terms “left” and “right” which are secularistic. I suggest that we say from now on “those who have kept the sense of the supernatural and those who have lost it”. That is the great divide, that is the essence.**

**Do you look at the Church and her teaching...with a supernatural eye, or do you look at it with secular lenses? That is the divide. Left and right confuses the issue. Let us re-discover the greatness and the beauty of the supernatural and I claim that it is so difficult in the polluted world in which we live, that if we don't pray for it every single day, we are going to be infected. It is the air that you breathe, the newspaper that you read, the television show that you see, time and again you will see this is a fight and attack on the supernatural.**

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Talk about hitting the nail on the head!

The **division** in the Church **today**—as it was **20 years ago**—is **clear**.

On the one side are those who look at the **Church** and her **teaching** with a **supernatural** eye.

On the other are those who *use the Church* as a **tool** to advance their **worldly agendas**, even to the extent of changing the Church and her teachings so dramatically that they will no longer be **recognizable**.

This division between the **supernatural** and the **secular** is much easier to identify these days than you might think. All you have to do is **listen to the words of the bishops and cardinals** who are speaking out about the crisis in the Church today and see **what they emphasize** as the *problem*...and **what solutions** they propose.

The cardinals and bishops in the **supernatural camp** speak of *spiritual* causes such as **disobedience** and **dissent** from Church teaching and propose **conversion back to Christ** by every member of the Church, as the remedy.

The cardinals and bishops in the **secularist camp** speak of *worldly* culprits such as “**clericalism**” and propose more **policies** and **procedures** which hold everyone accountable...everyone...but *themselves*.

The **Prophet Isaiah**, speaking the convicting words of God to the **worldly shepherds** of his time, said:

*His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark...The shepherds...have no understanding; they have all turned to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all.* (Isa 56:10-11)

In short, those **prelates**—then and now—who refuse to listen to God’s word become *“dumb dogs that cannot bark”*—**mute shepherds** who do not lead their flock to the *“green pastures and restful waters”* (cf. Ps 23:2)—**because they refuse to speak the truth...plainly.**

It would be almost **humorous**—if the consequences weren’t so **tragic**—to consider the contrast between the **“supernaturalist”** bishops and cardinals and the **secularist** bishops and cardinals *in light of today’s Gospel*. Here it’s instructive to revisit Jesus’ interaction with the deaf-mute man:

*...people brought to [Jesus] a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man’s ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, “Ephphatha!” (that is, “Be opened!”) And [immediately] the man’s ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly.* (Mk 7:32-35)

The **sequence of events** in this passage is critically important, because they show us how to **receive** the word of God—in order that we might **speak** it...*plainly.*

The first thing we notice is that Jesus took the man with him to a place of solitude—*“away from the crowd”* (cf. Mk 7:33). For us today, this means separating ourselves from the **noise**, the **news**, the **distraction**, the **din** of *negativity and confusion* swirling around us constantly in the midst of this crisis...in order to spend time with Jesus.

In other words...to **pray!**

When we submit to Jesus in **this** way—turning to him instead of *putting our trust in human beings* (cf. Ps 146:3)—he will open our ears to hear what **he** has to say about the **corruption in the Church...**and the corruption in **our own hearts!**

In the case of the **deaf-mute man**, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears to remove whatever made him **deaf to the voice of God**. Unlike those false-shepherds who **plug their own ears** to the voice of God—*with their own fingers*—and then spout off **secular drivel** instead of the **Gospel of Christ**, the supernaturally-inclined choose to be *“taught by God”* (cf. Jn 6:45) through his Holy Word in the **Sacred Scriptures...**in the **clear teaching of the Church...**and in **prayer**.

Then, the Lord can free our tongues to speak the truth with confidence and courage—to **call things what they are**—and to call ourselves and others to **repentance** and **conversion** so that Jesus can say to us:

*You are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* (Mt 5:14, 16)

So, does this mean that we—clergy and laity—should **just pray and then do nothing** about the crisis that divides the **House of God?**

Absolutely not!

But it *does* mean that we must **first** turn to Jesus for guidance before acting **rashly**.

Otherwise we will be no different than the *tone-deaf, secularist shepherds* who refuse to speak the truth—who focus on the **worldly** instead of the **supernatural**—who consider **the amount of plastic in the oceans** a more pressing problem than the **sea of filth than engulfs the Church**, and which threatens to **drown out the voices of victims**, and the **frustration of the faithful laity and clergy** who are tired of being led away from God by **deadbeat dads** instead of loved by **spiritual fathers**.

**The reason these deaf-mute “dogs” don’t speak the truth is because *they* don’t listen to Jesus!**

The cause of the crisis in the Church today is the **abandonment** of a supernatural orientation—**rooted in** dissent from the teaching of Christ through his Church—and **manifested in *spiritual and sexual abuse*** perpetrated and enabled by **spineless...faithless...false fathers at *all levels of the hierarchy***.

Jesus said in **Matthew’s** Gospel:

***Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.*** (Mt 7:15-16)

You will also know them their **words**...as they speak about the **crisis of trust** and **scandal of sin** in the Church today.

If you hear no talk of **sin** and **repentance from sin** from their mouths, **stop listening to them...and turn back to the Lord!**

Then you—and I—will be able to say, with the **Prophet Isaiah**:

***The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, That I might know how to answer the weary a word that will waken them. Morning after morning he wakens my ear to hear as disciples do; the Lord GOD opened my ear; I did not refuse, did not turn away.*** (Isa 50:4-5)

Then, and only then, will you and I **be** the light of the world—**instruments of holiness** in the hands of Jesus Christ—who after justly chastising his Church for her unfaithfulness, **will** bring her to a new level of **purity** and **holiness**...so that the world will ***see our good works***...and **hear** her ***Good News...and give glory to God*** (cf. Mt 5:16).