

SCREEN: Back to School

We'll, it's back to school!

At the end of Mass today I will offer a prayer

for all students and teachers and bless any backpacks or book bags you brought.

Now, I shared this before, but before I became a pastor

I was the chaplain at Good Counsel High School.

My duties included teaching freshmen religion.

And during the very first week of school I always gave my students a test - a pre-test really.

I needed to know how much they knew about the Catholic faith

and the pre-test was the perfect way to find out.

I didn't grade it, it was strictly to help me teach them.

The final question on the test was this:

What questions do you have about God or religion?

And I always got a whole range of responses.

Some wanted to know about the devil, heaven or hell,

others wanted to know what it's like being a priest.

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One question I got every year was,

Are the stories in the bible true?

It's a great question.

One that many young people have.

My students were coming from Catholic grade schools,

so for 8 years they'd been taught about all the miracles and healings

in scripture.

And now as adolescents who tend to question things,

they wanted to know, *'did these things really happen?'*

But it's not just teenagers and it's not just today.

For thousands of years skeptics have challenged

things that most of us take for granted.

For example, we know Jesus was a historical person.

Sources beside the Bible confirm this fact.

And Jesus wouldn't have attracted crowds of people nor the hatred of the religious leaders of the day if the miracles hadn't happened.

For disciples of Jesus, the deeper question isn't, did the miracles happen, but why?

Why did Jesus heal people?

What does it mean?

When we figure that out, we unlock the mystery of what Jesus's miracles mean for each of us.

So let's take a look at the miracle performed in today's Gospel reading.

A man was brought to Jesus who was deaf and had a speech impediment and he was healed.

What did this miracle mean?

Well, for the man who was healed, it meant a new life in so many ways.

In Jesus's day, those who were hearing impaired or otherwise physically challenged, were marginalized, abused, sometimes even killed. So for the man who was healed, it was like being given a new lease on life. Not just a new life physically, but also spiritually.

I say that because with every healing Jesus performed, the miracle always occurred with a person who had faith in Jesus - some degree of faith, no matter how small.

So the man who was healed now had deeper faith and conviction that Jesus was the messiah.

But this miracle also had a profound effect on those who witnessed it.

Jesus instructed them to not tell anyone, but they simply couldn't keep it to themselves.

They told everyone!

The good news had to be shared.

They were so astonished by Jesus that they even praised him.

They said, *“he has done all things well.”*

We can assume that after this miracle,
some chose to become followers of Jesus,
while others continued to question and search,
but most probably remained disbelieving.

Today’s Gospel forces us to decide,
what does this miracle mean to me?

I think this story should challenge each us to answer these two questions:

SCREEN: 1 what am I not hearing?

2 what am I not saying?

What am I not hearing, that God needs me to hear?

And what am I not saying, that God needs me to say?

See, we can all experience a form of
spiritual deafness and spiritual muteness.

Some of those in the crowd were like this.

They witnessed Jesus heal one person’s physical deafness,
but some were healed of their spiritual deafness -
their hearts and minds were opened and they became disciples.

They heard one man recover his physical ability to speak,
but some received a spiritual healing - their tongues were loosened and
they began to proclaim the Good News.

In the same way, the Lord speaks to us every day in so many ways,
but we can easily miss God’s voice.

It happens when we allow other voices and the noise of life
to drown out God speaking to us, creating a spiritual deafness.

How does God speak to us?

Through our family and friends,
through acts of love and kindness from others,
and through the blessings of our lives.

And it’s really easy to hear God in these things.

But God also speaks to us through people

we may be at odds with,

people we dismiss or have written off.

God also speaks to us through disappointment and setbacks,

through tragedy and crisis,

through sickness and death.

It's harder to hear God in these things,

but God is there, speaking to us.

He never abandons us.

God is always with us.

Our challenge then is to hear the voice of the Lord at all times

through every person and event.

When we do, we are healed of our spiritual deafness.

Jesus's healing of the man's speech impediment

should lead each of us to answer the second question on the screen,

What am I not saying that God needs me to say?

And this is a really important question to answer,

because with our voice, you and I have the power to lead someone to God.

A power we don't always realize we have.

In a recent survey, people were asked the question,

"Do you know any Christians?"

Overwhelmingly - more than 70% of people said,

"Yes, I know someone who is a Christian."

Then they were asked a follow up question:

"Do they live differently than you?"

And sadly, only 22% said, *"yes, they live differently than me."*

So most people know someone who is Christian by name,

but they don't see them living any differently from non Christians.

Do the people in your life see Christ in you?

Does the way you live day in and day out reflect Jesus?

SCREEN: They'll know we are Christians by our love

When I was a teenager, there was a song we used to sing in church.

It's titled, *They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love*.

Does that ring a bell?

The song expresses what others need to see and hear from those of us who follow Jesus.

They need to see and hear our love, our kindness, our generosity and our joy.

And when we say 'yes' to these things,

we say 'no' to their opposites:

no to hatred, to meanness, to selfishness, and being joy-less.

Just like the man in the Gospel today,

Jesus wants to heal us from anything that keeps us from sharing him with others.

So ask him to heal you from whatever impediment keeps you from being bolder when it comes to your faith.

If you ask for healing, Jesus will respond.

It may not be as instantaneous for you as it was for the man he healed, so be patient but also be persistent.

And don't just pray, also be willing to take a step of faith toward Christ.

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And I want to mention two specific ways you can do that this week.

At each and every Mass we have people at all stages of faith.

Some who are solid in their belief, others who have questions, and some with bigger doubts.

We even have some who are not Catholic.

If you are listening to my message now and

want to know more about God or faith,

our Becoming Catholic program may be just what you're looking for and it is beginning this Fall.

And there are others hearing this who know someone who is seeking or questioning.

Use your voice to tell them about our Becoming Catholic program.

And here is a second way you can use your voice to lead someone to Christ.

This past week we mailed an invitation to 350 of our parish households.

These are folks we haven't seen in the past year and a half.

The invitation they received lets them know we miss them and

we hope they will join us - in person or online -

for our Fall kick off next weekend.

I'm sure every one of you knows someone you miss seeing at church.

Why not reach out to them this week?

Just let them know you miss them and maybe invite them to join you for church.

It's one easy way you can use your voice to draw someone to Christ.

These two ways I've mentioned are opportunities to respond to

the voice of the Lord and tell others about him.

My students asked, "*Are the stories in the Bible true?*"

And the answer is yes, absolutely yes,

but the greatest truth of God's Word is revealed when we allow the Lord

to heal us and then courageously live our faith everyday.

Spend some time this week reflecting on today's message.

Then take a step in faith this Fall. Amen. +