

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

I suspect many of us, who live here, in the Willamette Valley, have had opportunities to travel to some of the higher elevations in the Cascades, like around Mt. Hood or Mt. Bachelor. We have probably experienced that plugged up feeling in our ears.

It's a rather unpleasant feeling, not being able to hear very well.

Then as we return to lower elevations, with the help of a yawning technique or chewing gum, our ears begin to pop open and return to our normal hearing range.

The ability to hear is an incredible gift, given to us by God, Our Father. It is so easy to take this gift for granted; to think that we will always be able to hear well.

In our gospel today, we are told that Jesus restored hearing to a deaf man. There's a great deal we can all learn from this story of the deaf man. As we grow older, many of us face the loss of our hearing, not necessarily total deafness, but maybe different degrees of hearing loss.

Conversations will be become more difficult. We will miss more and more words. Sounds will not be as clear.

It is important for all of us to remember, if we face the reality of a hearing loss, that **we are not alone. We worship a God who will give us the strength to accept our loss and to live with it gracefully.**

Even if our ears work perfectly, we are sometimes cut off from those we wish to be in relationship with. Shyness might keep us from speaking to another person who we want to get to know. Sometimes we just cannot find the words to say, even to those who are closest to us. We may worry about someone deeply, but not know how to tell them that we care.

It is easy to see **the sad irony of our times.** This is the age of communication: we have our computers, I-pads, and cell phones, but **we still can't always say what is in our hearts.** Too often we don't know how to be real friends with people. **Even with acute hearing, we can feel isolated and lonely.** Sometimes, this is because the other party is not being totally honest, but sometimes it is because we are not really listening.

No matter what the status of our hearing is, there is one thing we all can still do... And that is – **Listen.**

Listen to the messages that others are sending us.

- Does someone we love need us?
- Is someone who is hurting or hungry crying out for help?

Listen to the message of God.

- in the scripture readings,
- in the Gospel reading.

Listen with a sense of reverence,

- with attentiveness,
- with love and respect.

Listen well, while we are still able.

For all too soon the day may come when we can no longer hear well, when only a word or phrase here and there pierces our ears, whether it is the words of Holy Scripture or the words of a child.

Needless to say, we all live in a very troubled world. Every day we are bombarded with a lot of stories, advertisements and information. Unfortunately, not all of this information is completely honest and free of bias.

It is important that when we hear information that we pray for a sense of discernment for the truth, before we decide if we will share that information with others. Turning to God to help us with this discernment can help us to focus on what is true, so that all of us may live in society that is founded in truth.

As we meditate on the Gospel story, let us recognize what an incredible experience it was for the man to have his hearing restored and his speech impediment removed. **What a tremendous rush of joy that must have been for him!**

We do not always know how the Risen Christ will change us, bless us or restore us. Christ can surprise us with joy when we are at our lowest point. Christ can bring someone into our lives when we face nothing but loneliness. Christ can give us the words to say to someone who needs to hear our message.

Today, then, let us all be open to the surprising ways and the unexpected graces that God Our Father sends into our lives daily,

My prayer for you today:

May you all feel deep gratitude for the gift of hearing.

May you continue to hear and treasure the words of Holy Scripture.

May the words of Jesus permeate your heart and soul,

Bringing you peace, joy, love and hope.

Amen