

Readings: [Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

Can you keep a secret? Hummm... I don't know... not sure about this crowd...

All right, public confession time... raise your hand if there was a time when someone confided in you information important to them and asked that you tell no one, but it either slipped out unintentionally, or you couldn't help it and had to tell someone... who's done it?

It's difficult sometimes to keep a secret, we find that out early on. As our kids go back to school, they will be in many situations when a best friend tells them something to be kept secret. They themselves will have many secrets to share with those select few friends, and the temptation will be there to tell someone else.

But keeping secrets is no mere child play. Whether you are a kid in school or an adult at work, secrets are sacred, they are pieces of information that someone holds as important, information that belongs to them not us, which is why when we break the seal of secrecy, relationships are often strained or broken.

That is one of the themes that the gospel offers us today: Jesus orders people to keep a secret, but they are unable to do so. What does this say about us, our relationship with others, and our relationship with God? That will be our focus today.

First, a bit of historical context. We will stay with Mark's gospel for 10 more weeks, so we best get familiar with it.

It is the shortest of the gospels and it was originally written for Gentile Christians, meaning, converts to Christianity from other religions who had very little knowledge of Judaism. It was also written during a time of persecution so the temptation for these new Christian communities was to either share the wrong information about Jesus since they didn't have the Jewish knowledge of the Old Testament, or, walk away from their new faith in the midst of persecution. With that bit of context, today's gospel will make much more sense.

Jesus is traveling to previously visited areas to perform more miracles, so people already knew something about him either through rumors, gossip, or having witnessed miracles on his last visit. He is also in non-Jewish land, so people, not knowing the meaning of his words and actions, would have a much more difficult time understanding what it all meant.

In this phase of his ministry, Jesus is focused less on instruction, and more on miracles, meaning, manifesting signs of God's power working *through him for them*. He is trying to first earn their trust so that they would get to know who he really is, not as a miracle worker, not as a messiah for the Jews, but as a messiah reaching out to the world, including them.

This was a risky move. Since people had no knowledge of Jewish tradition, they could misunderstand his words and actions, and spread erroneous rumors about his identity which would obviously jeopardize his mission.

This is why Jesus orders them not to tell anyone, and does so in two more occasions later in this gospel. It is what is referred to as the great “messianic secret.”

Jesus did this because he knew we often like information more than people, and we like to share this information immediately, especially when our feelings and emotions are involved... and as it often happens, not everything we share in the moment is true.

*We’ve all experienced our share of misinformation these days.*

So he is asking them to let go of their immediate need to gossip, and to first be open to having a personal experience of God’s power through him. That would be the only way they could come to understand who he really was, and only then would they be ready for what was to come when at the end of the gospel Jesus gives them the opposite order: no longer to keep things secret, but to “go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15).

Unfortunately, many could not help it, and they went around telling others what they saw based on their own immediate understanding. They were more fascinated by the information than by the person, *they did not know him enough to love him.*

At the end, isn’t that what gossip is? The problem with failing to keep a secret is that we are more fascinated by the information being given than by the person confiding in us, so the problem is not a matter of self-discipline, it is a matter of love, of not loving someone enough to honor their privacy.

Jesus offers the solution to this problem through the action of healing of a man who had a hearing and speech impediment. Notice how Mark plays with these two impediments:

Being deaf, he could not hear others. Being mute, others could not hear him. Meaning, there was an impediment to know and be known, *to love and be loved*. We are dealing here, yes with a physical impediment on one level, but an impediment of the heart on another level: being unwilling, closed, to experiencing and know God's grace.

When our first inclination is to be reactionary and gossip, we are not being open to know and be known, to love and be loved. This only creates fear, rumors, indifference, racism, partiality... everything that is completely opposed to who God is, to Christian values.

Instead, throughout our lives, Jesus invites us to always take a step back, to allow Jesus to encounter us, and in doing so, *Ephphatha*, we become aware of our impediments, can in love reject them, and then live in the joy and freedom of being a Christian.

This is what Archbishop Eichten is helping us do through the pastoral planning initiative. Throughout the month of August, we ended the intercessions with the prayer for pastoral planning.

Echoing the vision of Pope Francis, the Archbishop is helping us refocus on the mission of the Church, that great commission found at the end of Mark's gospel to *go out and proclaim the good news*, that we not keep our faith quiet, personal, and secret as society would like us to... ***but***, to do so successfully, we need to ***first re-encounter Christ***. Otherwise, we risk spreading misinformation about our faith, we might

be tempted to stay quiet or walk away in persecution, or, could end up like some of the pharisees who proclaim nothing but doctrine and dogma but showed little care for people themselves. So the first step to that re-encounter is to renew our knowledge and experience of the Eucharist – things always go back to the Eucharist.

You know what the next chapter of Mark's gospel is after this miracle we just read? The feeding of the four thousand... the multiplication of the loaves of bread and fish... We will be skipping over it since we just spent a whole month on John's discourse on the bread of life, but it is worth mentioning how the physicality of eating that bread follows the invitation to encounter Christ... which is why the Eucharist is so central to us, and why Archbishop Eichten also began the renewal of this mission with the year of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist continues to be for us that continual encounter with Christ, that one-on-one time, that source of grace that has the power to open our lives to know and be known, to love and be loved, fully. May that be the encounter that breaks down any impediments in our own life. May that be the encounter that strengthens us to be the kind of friend the world needs us to be, the kind that loves others enough to honor them, enough to keep their secrets, enough to let our experience of knowing Jesus, no longer a secret.

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