



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 6, 2015

Healing Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be

By Janel Esker

I've read stories of people with profound deafness who receive a cochlear implant. Their initial adjustment to the new world of sound can be traumatic. Going from silence to a noisy world is shocking. I've also heard that when people with vision impairments have some sight restored, they can find their new world too bright, too vivid, and actually painful. Think of how startled you feel when the lights unexpectedly come on in a dark room. Now imagine how challenging a new world of sight or sound would be if darkness or silence is all you've known.

I wonder how the man in today's Gospel reading felt when Jesus opened his ears and his mouth. Were his first

words praise for Jesus, or were they confused questions about this new world he hadn't heard before? Was the noise of the crowd welcome or painful?

We might wish to be healed like this man—asking Jesus to open our eyes and unclog our ears to experience him and the world more clearly. But we might end up startled by unpleasant truths about ourselves.

The reading from James says God has chosen the poor and vulnerable, reminding us that we often disregard the poor, strive for riches, and become judgmental. When Jesus opens our eyes and ears, we can clearly see the divide between what God wants and how we act. Painful, indeed.

But this shouldn't prevent us from asking God to open us more fully. Jesus opened himself completely in life *and* on the cross, pouring himself out for us. He challenges us to do likewise—and it's the only way we'll grow into more compassionate, faithful disciples. †

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:4–7

“Be strong, fear not! Here is your God...”

James 2:1–5

“My brothers and sisters, show no partiality...”

Mark 7:31–37

“And immediately the man's ears were opened...”

A Word From Pope Francis

General Audience, June 11, 2014

The gift of *fear of the Lord*...does not mean being afraid of God: we know well that God is Father, that he loves us and wants our salvation, and he always forgives, always; thus, there is no reason to be scared of him! Fear of the Lord, instead, is the gift of the Holy Spirit through whom we are reminded of how small we are before God and of his love and that our good lies in humble, respectful and trusting self-abandonment into his hands.




PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your faithfulness. Teach me to bring the comfort of your loving presence to those who are afraid.

From *Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

Plain Talk: Splinters and Salvation

By Fr. Byron Miller, CSSR

When I got a splinter as a youngster, my mother would grow fainthearted at the thought of removing it herself. Instead I would wait with increasing anxiety for my dad to return from work and perform the routine but dreaded operation.

And so it happened. My dad would ask me to stretch out my hand under a bright light. There would be lots of weeping and wailing and grinding of teeth—mostly by my mother, who covered her eyes and supported me from a distance. My dad would perform the open-palm surgery with his sterilized pocketknife. While I was under the knife, my dad would engage me in conversation to distract me from what he was doing. It was an effective way to help ease a petrified kid's pain.

If Jesus ever got splinters assisting St. Joseph in his carpentry shop, I wonder how Joseph removed them and whether the experience was as painful for the child Jesus as it was for me. Maybe that is why Jesus used the graphic image of splinters in the eye to represent sin (see Matthew 7:1–5). Perhaps it influenced his saying “stretch out your hand” to the man with a withered hand in defiance of the Pharisees (see Mark 3:1–6).

Some words, such as *cancer* or *tumor*, can figuratively pierce our skin and travel directly to our heart. Because these words often signify danger to our



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What do I do when I encounter a fearful heart?
- Who can I comfort this week?

lives, they can cause us to become quite anxious. A diagnosis itself can numb us so much that we are afflicted with a form of paralysis. We plead our case, saying, “God, I don’t want to die. You said that we can choose life or death, and I choose life.” We remind God that our families need us. If all else fails, we try another plea: “God, don’t you need me to remain

on earth to do your will?” We also try the maneuver of bargaining with God, wrongly thinking that by resolving to live a better life we can earn a complimentary life extension. So we pray, “Dear God, how am I doing so far today? I have not been greedy or grumpy, nor have I been a gossip or a glutton. I have not even complained or cursed. But I will be getting out of bed in a moment, Lord, and I could sure use your help then.”

To engage in conversation with God, even if it feels like a plea bargain or a distraction from a painful reality, is far better than no conversation with God at all. We are God’s frightened children, and God wants to soothe our pain. Anthony de Mello, SJ, writes in *Contact With God* that God neither inquires “about our worthiness or unworthiness” nor probes our past life “with its failures and infidelities.” Rather, what matters is that “(a) we are crying out for him and we want him very much, (b) we are helpless to attain what we want, and (c) we believe he will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.”

Jesus’ dad, his *Abba*, witnessed his Son stretch out his hands on the splintered wood of a cross, opening his heart to all to heal our wounded nature, while Mary, his brokenhearted Mother, covered her eyes and supported him at the foot of the cross. On this open-palm and open-heart experience, our very faith is founded.

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 7–12

Mon.	Weekday: <i>Colossians 1:24–2:3 / Luke 6:6–11</i>	Thu.	Weekday: <i>Colossians 3:12–17 / Luke 6:27–38</i>
Tue.	<i>The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Micah 5:1–4 or Romans 8:28–30 / Matthew 1:1–16 or 18–23</i>	Fri.	Weekday: <i>1 Timothy 1:1–2, 12–14 / Luke 6:39–42</i>
Wed.	<i>St. Peter Claver: Colossians 3:1–11 / Luke 6:20–26</i>	Sat.	Weekday: <i>1 Timothy 1:15–17 / Luke 6:43–49</i>