

*And they bring unto him one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech;
and they beseech him to put his hand upon him.*

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Throughout the past few weeks we have prayed that God will help us to seek and to do such things as are right, we have acknowledged that we cannot do anything good without Him, that only when we submit ourselves to God's Will can we begin to live truly, and we have heard too how we are completely dependent on God's mercy and pity, asking God to give us the measure of grace needed to finish our lives in God's will and finally to obtain the promises of heaven. This all sounds wonderful, but how do we, mere mortals with jobs and families accomplish this? It sounds like too much to expect from the average Jack or the average Jill. After all, it is hard to keep our ears opened to the voice of God over the busyness of our lives, and it's hard to pray or to sing the Lord's praises when we do not always know the words or even when we don't feel particularly inclined to learn them.

We hear in this morning's Gospel that like the paralytic that was brought to Christ by his friends and lowered through the ceiling to the feet of Jesus, friends, and what good friends they are, bring a man to Jesus *to put his hand upon him*. However, this man was a gentile and brought by gentile friends to Jesus. Yet even though they are gentiles they have faith in Jesus and His abilities, and they ask Jesus to simply lay his hand on their deaf and mute friend. Their faith is rewarded, and the deaf ears are opened and the mute tongue is loosed. The man in today's Gospel was not born deaf and mute because of any sin, nor because of any sins committed by his parents. The defect in his senses was not the result of divine punishment. Yet we all are born spiritually deaf and mute as the sad effect of the Fall; we are born with our spiritual ears closed and our spiritual tongues stilled. But Jesus does more in this morning's Gospel than just place His hands upon a deaf and mute man. Our Lord works a miracle physically, but He also works a miracle spiritually. This miracle is a sign that the Lord can open not just physical ears but the spiritually deaf ears which have lost their hearing because of sin, and that He can loosen not just physically mute tongues, but spiritually mute tongues.

The good news is that our Lord continues to work these miracles today. God has given His Church a system to assist Him in opening deaf ears, even blinded eyes, and to loosen mute tongues, through the gifts of the Church, gifts of His grace, the Sacraments. We teach there are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Marriage, Unction, and Ordination. God opens our ears to hear His voice and loosens our tongues to sing His praises through the first three Sacraments: through the waters of Baptism, and the Holy Oil of Confirmation, and

to renew this healing through the confessional. The sinful nature must first be washed away through Baptism, the cleansing sealed through Confirmation, and then frequently restored to the Grace of Baptism throughout our lives in the Confessional.

St. Ambrose the great doctor of the Church and fourth century Bishop of the city of Milan writes, *Remember, then, that you received a spiritual seal, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of holy fear. Keep safe what you received. God the Father sealed you, Christ the Lord strengthened you and sent the Spirit into your hearts as the pledge of what is to come.* Baptism and Confirmation strengthen us to live the kind of life that Christ calls us into through our Prayer Book Collects, Epistles, and Gospels. St. Ambrose alludes here to the very key of the Sacrament of Confirmation, the outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us. That which began in Baptism is enlarged and embraced by willing hearts that now reaffirm their Baptismal Vows as the Holy Spirit instills within us seven gifts; four intellectual gifts helping us to know what is right, and three moral gifts helping us to do what is right. Confirmation fine tunes our moral compass, it gives the reigns of our minds and hearts over to the Holy Spirit and it amplifies the voice of our consciences. Baptism and Confirmation open our spiritual ears to the voice of Christ and loosen our tongues for prayer and His praises.

Baptism and Confirmation do all of these wonderful things as they are a part of that *new ministration of the Spirit* which St. Paul tells us of this morning. No longer do circumcision and endless bloody sacrifices bring us into communion with God by providing an entrance into His Church. *For the old things have passed away, behold all things have been made new.* No longer are we required to keep endless ceremonial and ritual laws, for now we have been given a system of Grace through the *ministration of the Spirit*. We enter the Church through Baptism and Confirmation, we partake of the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ through Holy Communion, and we are brought again to the cleansing blood of Christ through Confession. Confession is the means by which, if our spiritual hearing is lost again, or our tongues grow mute, or if our spiritual eyes grow dim, they may be restored.

Next Sunday, when we witness the Confirmations of our brother and sister in Christ, may we be reminded of our own Confirmations. May we listen closely to the vows made and remember the vows we also made. Perhaps since our own Confirmations our spiritual ears have closed again, our spiritual eyes blinded, our tongues mute, may we be inspired to visit the confessional. To have our

spiritual senses restored, that we may ever perceive and know God, His Will, and His work in our lives.

And so today we pray, *Almighty and Everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve: Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, Our Lord. Amen.*