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The single theme of today's Collect, Epistle, and Gospel is that only through the atoning merits and mediation of Jesus Christ do we dare to hope for the outflow of all God's good things into our lives. God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and He alone, through His Son, forgives sin. God's greatest good gift to us is His Son, Jesus Christ, Who's work is continued to us through the Holy Spirit. As Fr. John Henry Blunt writes so eloquently:

*The Incarnation of the Son of God was the origin, and the Mystical Presence of Christ the continuation of a spiritual life which the world had not before known since the Fall. The Church of God had grown deaf and heard not the Voice from Heaven as that Voice had been heard of old; there was an impediment in her speech, so that the Word of God did not go forth from her lips in prophecy. The Son of God came down on earth, and touched her by making Himself one with her through His human nature; the sigh of His Passion was followed by the "Ephphatha" of the Resurrection; and as soon as His work was perfected by the looking up to Heaven of His Ascension and Session at the right hand of God, the ears of the deaf were unstopped to receive the Inspiration of Pentecost, and the tongue of the dumb loosed, so that "their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words into the ends of the world."*

We see that the miraculous healing in this morning's Gospel transcends just a poor, deaf, and stammering man. We are reminded that this is nothing out of the ordinary for our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is going to repeat this miracle in a more dynamic and transcendent way with His own life, death, Resurrection and Ascension. Is it any surprise then that the same God who has done all of this for us, is more ready to *hear than we to pray!* These past few weeks, we have been invited to consider God's Will for our lives, and this morning we are reminded that every effort we make to be true to God's Will in our lives, and to pray to be faithful to him, in every turn of our hearts toward Him, He is there waiting for us. When we forget him and turn to our own preoccupations, He is still there, waiting to hear our prayer, and to forgive us no matter how much pain we have caused him by our sin. As Isaiah prophesies: *And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear* (Isa. 65. 24).

The Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for this morning inspire us to acknowledge that God is indeed accustomed to *give more than either we desire or deserve*. Remember the story of the prodigal son who returns to his father asking only to be treated as a hired servant, but instead receives a loving and forgiving welcome as a son who was lost but is now found, a son who was dead and is now alive. He finds complete restoration, the affectionate embrace of a loving father, not to mention the finest clothing, and a wonderful banquet (Luke 15. 11-32). Likewise, God offers us a spiritual feast if we surrender our hearts, souls, and minds completely to Him. As one commentator writes, *He will embrace us with his saving and forgiving wounds, and he welcomes us to that gracious banquet of the Holy Communion where we eat the Bread of*

*eternal salvation and drink the Cup of everlasting life. No one has ever turned to God and not received the promise: "Let him return..., to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55. 7).*

And so, this morning, we plead with God to forgive us *those things whereof our conscience is afraid*, all the while asking him to *pour down His blessing upon us*. Which one of us finds it easy to admit some of our sins, some of our shortcomings? Which one of us can fully comprehend the love of God, that *while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*, and not have a troubled conscience when we examine our hearts? But we must confess all to him *unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid*, for if we confess all, we will be forgiven all. We must, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes, *come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*. We are reminded again this morning of the great truth that God loves us not so much because of what we have done in our lives, but because of what He has done for us in His Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Though we may have sinned many times over, the main burden of our redemption lies not upon our own shoulders, but on the shoulders of God's divine son, Jesus. From Conception to Crucifixion, Jesus lived out His human life as an act of love and redemption for us personally. He has paid the price for our sins. He instituted Sacraments to raise us up to a supernatural state of life even in this world, and to restore us to that state as often as we might fall from it by sin. God desires us to grow and flourish spiritually, so that our fears

and anxieties might be replaced by the spiritual fruit of humility and gratitude. This is what the blood of Jesus Christ accomplishes for our souls, that only which purifies our consciences and makes us free of guilt and sin. As is recorded in the Scriptures, *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* (Heb. 9. 14).

We must not doubt that our sins will be forgiven, if we confess them with a penitent heart and true faith in Him. The Scriptures encourage us to draw *near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*, sprinkled clean with the blood of Jesus Christ, *and our bodies washed with pure water*, a reference to our spiritual washing in Baptism. (Heb. 10. 22). So today, we must recognize that too often we have been like the deaf and stammering man in this morning's Gospel. Our spiritual ears have been shut to God's Word, and our mouths have been unable to do more than stutter out Christ's truth. We must confess this sin, and beg God to open our hearts, minds, and souls to His will and calling in our lives and in our families. We are taught to boldly pray that our impediments of sin will be cleansed and removed. We pray for those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but only through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ. If this becomes the habit of our hearts, practiced in a rule of life, a pattern of prayer, we shall begin to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, and speak out the truth that Christ has established for us,

remembering always, *He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. (Mark vii. 37)*