

23B SML 2018
MK 7:31-37

Start in silence.

That may have been awkward for some of us. Some of you may be thinking, “Is he OK? Did he forget what he was going to say?” It may have been awkward for another reason, namely, we don’t handle silence all that well – at least not most of us.

If today’s gospel proclaimed just now is supposed to, in some spiritual way, speak to each one of us, somehow, some way, perhaps it is that we are the deaf mute. We are just like him in an odd kind of way. Neither one of us can hear. He can’t hear because he has a disability, and we can’t hear because there’s just too much noise.

See if this sounds familiar for those my age, 57 this month. Better yet, for any of us, say from 16 to that glorious age when you can retire, which will never happen for me.

Alarm goes off.

Jump in the shower. Water in my ears. Can’t hear.

Quick cup of coffee.

Hop in the car.

Fight traffic. 70’s a parking lot. So’s the Admiral Wilson Blvd.

Turn on the radio: music, talk radio, mindless callers calling in.

Get to the office.

Emails, texts, voice mails, meetings, class, lectures
Back in the car.

Fight traffic. The boulevard is a parking lot. So's 70.

Yell at other drivers. Traffic. Horns. Gestures

Kids. Noise. Home. Dinner. TV. Emails. Homework.

Sleep. Repeat.

That's your day. Many of our days.

Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard once said, "If I could prescribe one remedy for all that ill the modern world, I would prescribe silence." Because even if the word of God were to be proclaimed, no one would be able to hear it. And that was in 1840. Of course, the objection for many of us is we don't have time for silence. I retort that is because we don't make time.

I would be one of them, which is why I get up an hour before my daily Mass and make a holy hour. Some of my brother priests roll out of bed and walk into Church five minutes before the Mass. They are the ones that say they don't have time for silence. Neither would I. Because I make time for my Holy Hour, I can bring my schedule, my calendar, my concerns, my responsibilities as your pastor, the current crisis in the Church, my yada yada yada, and bring it to Him in silence. I don't need to explain any of it to Him because as I've said so many times from this pulpit, "He's got it. He's got all of it." I bring it in silence and I sit in silence and ask,

“Lord, if there’s anything I need to do, put it on my mind.” And He does. That’s listening.

Silence is the remedy, silence is important because life is plagued and racked with the noise of fear, worry and anxiety: for us, for our children, the family addict, finances, decisions, name it. The purpose of silence is not to do nothing. The purpose of silence is to listen, not necessarily to hear, but to be open to whatever the Lord puts on your mind, and often that comes not by hearing the Lord in word, but rather in thought. For me, it’s thought. And many of my thoughts for a “to do” plan come during my Holy Hour. I can think about it, pray about it, and bam, the thought of what to do comes to me during my Holy Hour.

Another instrument Our Blessed Lord uses during my Holy Hour is spiritual reading. Needless to say, what has been front and center for me this past month is the crisis with the Church, and reconciling the marks of the Church: one, holy Catholic and apostolic. Specifically the Church as holy. The Church is holy? Lord, help me swallow that pill. Well, here is what the Lord put before me in my spiritual reading during my Holy Hour this past Monday, Labor Day.

Pope Benedict’s Introduction to Christianity, was first published in 1968, when he was just Father Ratzinger, a priest and theologian. It is a remarkable book — lucid and profound. Ratzinger

writes about what it means to call the Church “holy,” given that the sins of its members are scarlet. Ratzinger does not downplay the corruption in the Church, but points out that this is a great mystery at the heart of the Christian faith. God himself took on flesh, mingling his all-holiness with our filth. Ratzinger writes:

He has drawn sin to himself, made it his lot, and so revealed what true “holiness” is: not separation, but union; not judgment, but redeeming love. Is the Church not simply the continuation of God’s deliberate plunge into human wretchedness; is she not simply the continuation of Jesus’ habit of sitting at the table with sinners, of his mingling with the misery of sin to the point where he actually seems to sink under its weight? Is there not revealed in the unholy holiness of the Church, as opposed to man’s expectation of purity, God’s true holiness, which is love, love that does not keep its distance in a sort of aristocratic, untouchable purity but mixes with the dirt of the world, in order thus to overcome it? Can, therefore, the holiness of the Church be anything else but the bearing with one another that comes, of course, from the fact that all of us are borne up by Christ? Benedict goes on:

The bottom line is there is always hidden pride at work when criticism of the Church adopts that tone of rancorous bitterness which today is already beginning to become a fashionable

habit. (Keep in mind this is 1968 but it sounds oh so familiar) Unfortunately it is accompanied only too often by a spiritual emptiness in which the specific nature of the Church as a whole is no longer seen, in which she is only regarded as a political instrument whose organization is felt to be pitiable or brutal, as if the real function of the Church did not lie beyond organization, in the comfort of the Word and of the sacraments that she provides on good days and on bad days alike. Those who really believe do not attribute too much importance to the struggle for the reform of ecclesiastical structures. They live on what the Church always is; and if one wants to know what the Church really is, one must go to Church. For the Church is most present, not where organizing, reforming, and governing are going on, but in those who simply believe and receive from her the gift of faith that is life to them. Only someone who has experienced how, regardless of changes in her ministers and forms, the Church raises men up, gives them a home and a hope, a home that is hope — the path to eternal life — only someone who has experienced this knows what the Church is, both in days gone by and now.

The construction has begun: new offices, renovations to the Emmaus Center, but most significantly, is the Adoration Chapel going in to what was the Baptistry. Most of you know, but maybe

some of you don't, once the Adoration Chapel is completed, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed in that Chapel so we will have a place to come and listen in silence. Before work, lunch hour, after work, the middle of the night. You decide. He will be here. In fact, on the opposite wall facing the Eucharist will be a mural with two scenes. The first scene will portray John the Baptist pointing out Jesus as recorded in John 1:29 when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God," just as the priest does at every Mass before we receive Him. The other scene will be the Baptism of Jesus, when the Father's voice speaks from heaven, "This is my beloved Son (MT 3:17) . . . Listen to Him . . . Listen to Him (from the Transfiguration.)

Here's the challenge. Many of you are on board. We had a Holy Hour sign up campaign this past spring and God is pleased with those who signed up. He's looking forward to speaking to you in the silence. Others of you think you may not have the time. So pray about giving a holy half hour. And those on board will pray for you who do not think you have the time, so they will join us to sit in silence, to listen to Him.

The man in the gospel today could not speak because he could not hear. Once you hear, you talk. Once we hear the Lord, we share the Gospel. You cannot not. The gospel today is very

graphic. Jesus puts his finger in the man's ear. He touches his tongue. Who does that? Jesus does.

What is about to happen at the end of these aisles in a few minutes is just as graphic. Jesus will touch our tongues in the Eucharist and become part of our bodies. So as we encounter Him in the Eucharist in a most tangible way, let's ask for the grace to have our ears opened and our lips loosed.