

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time • B

September 5-6, 2009 • Christ the King

In this Gospel story, the man who could not speak or hear was brought to Jesus. Jesus takes him aside privately, away from the attention of the crowd, and heals him with a unique blend of actions—putting his fingers in the man’s ears, and spitting upon his hands before touching the man’s tongue. He connects to the man by using the remaining senses left to him, his sense of sight and taste and touch. And with a single phrase, “Be opened!” Jesus opened up the man’s clogged portals of hearing and speech. It was a terrific moment for the man, and for his entire town! But here the story takes one of two strange twists.

First strange twist, is the command to remain silent that Jesus that gave to this man with his newly restored speech and to his loyal friends. Jesus wants them to keep quite about the single most important thing that had ever happened to them. Imagine that! Stop the presses! Forget the town parade, the dancing in the streets, and the man hoisted up on everyone’s shoulders shouting his gratitude to Jesus at the top of his newfound voice. Forget the cartwheels of delight as the man shares the good news to anyone would listen to him. No, the plain and stern command of Jesus was to tell no one about the healing. Why would Jesus want to silence this man about the miraculous healing? Wouldn’t this be the best use of his ability to speak?

Numerous theories abound to explain this curious restriction on the man’s testimony. In fact, this is only one of several times when Jesus tries to limit the spread of his fame. Some scholars call it the “Messianic Secret”, meaning the deliberate and consistent attempt by Jesus to limit the volatile buzz and false expectation that such news would generate. Jesus did not want the fickle hysteria of the crowd and the resulting backlash from those in political and religious power to define who he is and his ministry. He had a bigger mission than just the healing of a limited number of sick persons or the feeding of a hungry crowd, or meeting their definition of Messiah.

But then story has another strange twist for us. After making a clear command to the man and his friends to tell no one, **the first thing they did was to disobey.** Mark’s Gospel makes it clear; Jesus asked them to do one thing, and one thing only—to remain silent, to hold this wonderful news to

themselves. You would think that if this strange Galilean who had just healed you of two disabilities ordered to do something, you would do it, no questions asked, just out of gratitude to him.

But they just couldn't help themselves. They directly disobeyed the command of Jesus, and they told everyone about the miracle, and about the wonderful man who performed it. In fact, as Saint Mark tells it, "*the more [Jesus] ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it.*" What are we to make of this blatant disobedience to the order of Jesus? First, notice that Jesus did not turn on them in fury or judgment. **It is as if he knew they could not help but tell such good news.** Gratitude, love and joy do that to a person. They can't be contained.

We have so much for which to give thanks. God has given us so much. We have all that we need; most of what we want. But we can become accustomed to being gifted. We can even forget who is gifting us. We take it for granted and forget to be grateful, to give thanks.

In the pew is a card entitled, **Attitude of Gratitude**. There is a place to write something for which you are grateful, and/or to recognize someone for their service or gifts. You can fill it out and place it in the offertory as a concrete way of giving thanks. Or you can take the card home as an invitation to deepen our sense of gratitude.

As we gather at this Eucharist, a word that means thanksgiving, we pause and thank our God, just like those in today's Gospel. Jesus no longer asks that we keep quiet, in fact he invites us to tell the whole world. We know who he is; and what type of Messiah, He gave his life, and we are so blessed. Let us give thanks!