

But the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it.

St. Mark 7:36b

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Some of you may have noted that this coming Monday marks the 25th anniversary of the death of Mother Teresa, who six years ago, on September 4, 2016, was declared a saint by Pope Francis: St Teresa of Calcutta.

She was one of the most compelling figures of the 20th century; for those of us old enough to remember her life, she was a living, breathing, walking saint of our own lifetime; not someone that we could just read about in dusty old books but someone that we saw live on TV; or for those so blessed, in person.

One person who was so blessed was Malcolm Muggeridge, who in 1969 produced a BBC documentary of Mother Teresa's work entitled 'Something Beautiful for God', which was later published as a book under the same title. In the book he speaks of seeing her off at the train station in Calcutta: it was very early [in the] morning, and the streets were full of sleeping figures; sleeping with [the] ...abandon of the homeless poor.

He writes of that moment when the train on which she is leaving begins to move away, and as he walks back to the car that has brought them to the station, he senses that something has changed; that something of incredible beauty and joy has left a place which is filled with so much suffering and squalor.

He describes it this way:

Something of God's universal love has rubbed off on Mother Teresa, giving her ... a noticeable luminosity; a shining quality.

A light that somehow has the power to brighten even the desolation that surrounds her; that somehow lightens the misery of the landscape in which she works; as well as the misery of the human heart that creates such misery. That because her heart has been touched by Christ, she shines with love in a landscape all too lacking in love.

Moses stands on the mountain speaking with God; as a man might stand speaking with a friend. God speaks of the covenant that he is making with his people; the people whom he has rescued from slavery in Egypt; the people whom he is leading to freedom in the Promised Land; a nation that he is making with his own hand; who will be his people for ever and for always. And as Moses comes down from the mountain with the two tables of stone in his hands, those two tables which will stand for all time as the sign and seal of this new covenant that God is making, this new relationship of mutual love and commitment, his face shines; reflecting the glory of the God with whom he has been speaking. A glory which, we hear in this week's Epistle, fades as time passes; until such time that Moses returns to the mountain to speak with God and is again brightened with God's glory.

A man who cannot hear and speaks only with great difficulty is brought to Jesus, that Jesus might touch him and heal him. Jesus takes him aside from the crowd; and reaches out with his hand to put his fingers in his ears; and he spits and touches the man's tongue. And after he has looked up to the heavens, he speaks to the man's

ears and tongue and commands that they be opened. And the man is healed. And so amazed are the people by this great act of compassion and healing that they announce to all who will hear this great news. In spite of the fact that Jesus tells them not to. Having seen such power; having witnessed something beyond their understanding, they can do only one thing, as much as they have been told not to do so. They have to share what they have seen.

In so many ways, the man in this week's Gospel stands as a symbol, a metaphor, for the human story. In so many ways his condition is our shared condition. Every day humanity struggles to speak with clarity and understanding; to know how to say what has to be said. But just as much, humanity struggles every day to hear with patience and compassion. We so easily fall into the snare of misunderstanding and resentment because we talk past each other rather than speaking with each other.

In a very profound way, this week's Gospel speaks of the brokenness of human life: both the physical brokenness of illness and disease but also, in another way, the broken relationships that mark and mar human lives. We read about a person who couldn't hear; but perhaps even more tragic is a person who can hear but won't.

And isn't that a problem that, in some way or another, we all struggle with? How often does someone hear what we're saying without really hearing; without really trying to understand what we're saying? And how many times do we struggle with what we have to say; not knowing how to say what our heart tells us we need to say? And how often do we speak too quickly, only to later regret what we've said? And how often do we struggle to say that we're sorry; or to tell someone, honestly and without reserve, that they're forgiven.

Speaking and listening is not just a matter of *talking and hearing*. It's something deeper, something that requires us to give more of ourselves; not just talking and hearing but actually *speaking and listening*.

In so many different ways, the difficult moments of our lives, and the memories of those moments which we carry within us, can close not just our ears but also our hearts and our minds. Resentment stored away in our hearts builds up over time until we no longer hear what someone is saying to us because all that we're able to hear are the words and memories of past hurts and past wrongs.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ promises something else, something very different. It promises us forgiveness; it promises us new life and new beginnings; it promises us freedom in Jesus Christ; in the very same way that Christ offered a new life and a whole new beginning, to the poor man.

Ephphatha, 'be opened', is a word that Jesus speaks not just to the deaf man in this week's Gospel but to each one of us, to the whole Church.

But *ephphatha* is a word that Christ calls us to speak to all.

That, having been freed by Christ; having seen his love; having known his mercy; Christ calls us to shine the light of his mercy into every corner of our lives.

We have seen God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

And we can best share that glory in our commitment to speak and to listen with patience and compassion. And to radiate love every day.