

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 5th 2021
A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O’Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

Touch our ears and tongues, Lord

Last Saturday I had the great privilege of baptising my beautiful grandniece, Juliet. Actually, I prefer to refer to the sacrament as a Christening. Baptism means having a bath, being washed and cleansed. Christening, or Christ-ening, expresses the new life received, a living relationship with Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord. After naming the child and reminding the parents and godparents of their responsibilities, the celebrant then welcomes the child to the Christian community and claims the child as belonging to Christ, “I claim you for Christ our Saviour by the sign of his cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead, and invite your parents to do the same.”

The oil of Christ-ening

After the baptism with water, the newly baptised is anointed on the head with the oil of chrism. Christ’s name means the Anointed One. “As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.” As a member of the body of Christ on earth, a Christian is called to the mission of bringing the light of Christ to the world.

This Christian calling is beautifully expressed in Saint Teresa of Avila’s reflection.

“Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now but yours, no hands, no hands, no feet on earth but yours.” Christ is counting on you.

Touching the ears and mouth

The Gospel this Sunday (Mark 7:31-37) is the story of Jesus healing the deaf man who had an impediment in his speech. Touching the ears and mouth may be included in the baptismal ceremony as the celebrant prays: “The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father.”

Are my ears open to God’s word, reading it, listening to it, pondering it in the heart?

Do I listen to what others say? Do I make an effort to hear what they find it hard to say?

Do I hear the pleas of those in need?

Do I heed the opinions or advice of others?

Is my mouth sanctified?

A poisoned tongue spits out cynicism, anger, deceit, hurt, character assassination, destructiveness, etc. Does the same tongue which receives the Lord in the Eucharist attack other members of his mystical body?

The words of a true Christian bring love, peace, happiness, affirmation, consolation, good advice and laughter.

The gift of speech is misused in blasphemy, profanity or obscenity. Or the tongue can be the instrument of thanks, praise and prayer.

One word which should have no place in the life of a faithful follower of Christ is vengeance. It is mentioned in today's First Reading, from Isaiah. "Courage! Do not be afraid. Look, your God is coming, vengeance is coming, the retribution of God; he is coming to save you." What a turnabout! God's vengeance is the total opposite of human vengeance. In human vengeance hatred is stronger than love but in God's vengeance, love triumphs over vindictiveness. God's idea of vengeance is to destroy the sin while converting the sinner. Jesus asks us to pray for those who persecute us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you first touched our ears and tongues on the day of our baptism.

May we live each day faithful to what you have begun in us.

Open our ears, Lord, to hear your word in the Scriptures,
to heed your guidance in the commandments,
and to listen with you in quiet reflection.

Clear away the deafness of our selfish preoccupation
so that we might hear what others need to say,
draw out what is locked away in their darkness,
and respect each person's unique history.

Open up the doors of our hearts in sensitivity to pain,
in concern for justice, and in compassion for all who are suffering.

Release our tongues of their impediments
so that we might gladly sing your praises,
gratefully proclaim your kindness
and confidently witness to your presence.

Remove all traces of envy and vengeance from our speech,
so that we might be quick to affirm but slow to blame,
ready to thank and slow to begrudge,
willing to forgive and loathe to condemn.

Release our tongues from scandal and free them for goodness.

Cleanse them of obscenity and brighten them with joy.

Rid them of vulgarity and prepare them to bless.

Lord Jesus, you do all things well.

You make the deaf hear and the dumb speak.