

I In today's Gospel from Mark we read about a man referred to as "deaf", today we might say hearing impaired. We are told he also has a speech impediment and he is later referred to as "mute." He did not come to Jesus on his own, but "people brought" him to Jesus. Touching the man's ears and his tongue Jesus commands they "Be opened." After that we learn the man "spoke plainly." We can use this Gospel passage as a way to understand what is occurring in the Church today with the breaking news of the Pennsylvania grand jury report on clerical sexual abuse of minors that goes back to the 1940's.

A. Some of the victim/survivors were in a tragic way mute. They were not clinically mute, they could speak, but they could not speak publically about their abuse. The trauma of the past event or events silenced them. Just as people brought the deaf and mute man to Jesus for healing, in many cases people, family and friends who supported the abuse victim, brought him or her forward so they could find their voice. Some found it publically before the grand jury. Some continue to find their voice. Spiritually we can imagine Jesus gently urging them to "Be opened," to speak!

B. Other victims always had their voice and spoke to church and or civil authorities. In these cases it was like they were speaking to the deaf. They were not heard. It has taken years for those in authority to hear their pleas and their

pain. Finally through human effort and God's grace the hearing impediment of those in authority is being removed. Again, we can hear Jesus sternly saying to the deaf authorities "Be opened," listen!

C. It takes a village to allow sexual abuse to occur. The 2015 movie Spotlight presents how this happened in Boston. In the opening scene set in 1976 two police officers are discussing the arrest of a priest for child molestation. Into the precinct walks the assistant district attorney telling the two officers not to let the press hear about the arrest. Church officials are seen meeting privately with the mother of the child. The arrest is hushed up and the priest is released. Everyone became mute. It is later revealed that the lead editor of the Spotlight team of Boston Globe reporters had received a list of 20 offending priests almost 10 years before but he did not follow up on it. Even the press was mute. In some cases even family members did not want to talk about it outside the family. It was too painful and embarrassing.

D. It was a different era then than it is now. Thank God we are not still in that previous time of mute silence and deaf authorities. We aren't perfect but we are getting better. We now look back with disgust at that time in the last century, especially the 1960's through the 1980's when most of the abuse occurred, wondering

how could this have happened. How could rational adults think this was the right thing to do?

E. We know better today but somehow we didn't then. That is not unusual. At one time we had legalized slavery in this country, the land of the free. Some people saw nothing wrong with it. Most people were mute about it. At one time women were not permitted to vote. By law they were politically mute. At one time 6 million Jews were exterminated and much of the world was both deaf to their pleas and mute in speaking out about it.

F. Every current age believes it is more enlightened than any previous age. Every current age believes every previous age was horrifically cruel and ignorant. Often the past has been exactly that way. Maybe we are becoming a more enlightened people. I hope so. However, I think it is a sure bet that 70 years from now people will not see us in as kindly a light as we presently see ourselves.

G. None of what I just said is an excuse for the Church allowing clerical child sex abuse to occur. The Church is guilty of the sins of being intentionally deaf and mute. Fortunately, almost all of the abuse described in the grand jury report occurred in the past. The report describes the church from the 1940's to approximately 2002. It does not describe the church of today. Since 2002 when the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops implemented the Dallas Charter the

Catholic Church in the United States has made major improvements in child protection policies and procedures and the grand jury report acknowledges that. Jesus has commanded the Church's ears and mouth "Be opened." First hear the pain of the survivors and then speak the truth. With regard to child protection, the Church of today is not the Church it was.

H. Now as always we turn to God in prayer. We have an obligation to pray to God for the Church, but we have an obligation to first pray to God for the victims/survivors that they may find healing and justice.



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