

## Homily for Pentecost 15, 2021

Mark 7:24-37

*'Being brought to Jesus'*

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### **Mark 7:24-37**

*From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,<sup>25</sup> but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.<sup>26</sup> Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.<sup>27</sup> He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'<sup>28</sup> But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'<sup>29</sup> Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.'<sup>30</sup> So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

*<sup>31</sup> Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. <sup>32</sup> They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. <sup>33</sup> He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. <sup>34</sup> Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.'<sup>35</sup> And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. <sup>36</sup> Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. <sup>37</sup> They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'*

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## INTRODUCTION

I want to begin by asking you to consider something very simple.

For many people,  
The first time they ever enter a Church,  
The first time they are ever present in a worship service,

They don't walk in,  
They are brought.

This is of course because for many people this happens as children,  
Babies even.

This is the way it was for me,  
And for many of you.

I grew up in a Christian home,  
And so before I ever had the physical ability to get to church on my own,  
My parents brought me,  
They would've literally carried me in.

And by God's grace,  
they also brought me to the waters of Holy Baptism.

Some of you didn't have any contact with Christ and his Church in childhood,  
You came to faith and were baptised as adults,  
so it's a little bit different for you,

But even then, it's a rare person who comes to faith,  
Without another human being taking an active role in somehow bringing them to God.

Whether it's inviting them to church or a class,  
Maybe picking them up and bringing them along with,

Or more actively sharing the Gospel with them and reading the Bible together,

They **brought** you along.

There's something deeply spiritual significant in this reality,  
Of being brought to Jesus.

I say this mainly,  
Because so often we see this happening in the Gospels themselves,  
Not least in our text today.

Where there are two quite separate stories which are different in many details,

But have the common thread of people **bringing** others to Jesus,

And him acting graciously and mercifully for them.

So let's have a closer look,  
And see how this text can encourage us in our faith today.

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## DIFFERENT WAYS OF BRINGING PEOPLE TO JESUS

So first,  
Notice the different ways in people are brought in Jesus in these two accounts.

In the first one,  
Who is being brought to Jesus?

The daughter of this Syrophonecian woman,  
Who we're told is has an *unclean spirit*.

The interaction between the woman and Jesus is so dramatic and memorable,  
That you can easily forget that she's not actually coming for her own personal need,  
But for her daughter,  
And at the end it's her daughter who is freed from the demon.

So in this account the woman brings her daughter to Jesus, not physically,  
But in the sense of bringing her need to him,

Begging Jesus for help on her daughter's behalf.

It's not the only time this happens in the Gospels,  
And perhaps even more significantly,  
Not the only time it happens with the needs of a person's child in particular.

And the most noticeable aspect of the woman bringing her daughter's needs to Jesus,  
Is the ***struggle*** that it entails, isn't it?

People often find this difficult and jarring the way Jesus speaks to the woman here,

As she brings her daughter to Jesus it's not straight forward,  
Not without its challenges,

But she is persistent and won't take no for an answer,

She has a faith which is willing to beg for crumbs.

Now compare this with how a person is brought to Jesus in the second account.

We read,

<sup>32</sup>*They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.*

So what's happening here?

These unnamed people are **physically** bringing a man in need to Jesus.

The man is deaf and unable to speak clearly,  
This may have meant he was a beggar too.

He may have been completely unaware Jesus was around,  
Even if he did,  
he probably wouldn't have the ability to be able to get to where Jesus was,

But others **brought** him,

We don't know who,

Perhaps family,  
Friends.

It happens quite a few times in the Gospels,

Just in this Gospel I counted another six occasions where something like this happens,

So the theme of bringing others to Jesus is a significant one in the Gospels,

And it happens in different ways.

Sometimes physically,  
Sometimes bringing their needs,  
Coming on another's behalf.

Sometimes the person bringing another is engaged themselves and goes through quite a struggle,  
Sometimes not.

Dear friends in Christ,

Be encouraged in the privilege you have as a Christian person,

In brining others to Jesus.

You parents who have brought your children to holy baptism,  
Where they are united to Christ and his death and resurrection,  
This is a good thing.

You parents, grandparents and others who bring your children to worship,  
Sometimes in quite difficult circumstances,

This is a good thing.

When you notice a person without transport and you bring them to worship,  
This is a good thing,

You are in this long line from these people in our text,

Brining others to Jesus.

When you invite a friend to church who hasn't been for a long time,  
Or to an enquirer's class,

Or even to a quiz night,

His is all part of the Church's role in brining other to Jesus.

But perhaps most of all,  
This is an encouragement to pray for others.

Remember the Syrophonecian woman?

She brought the needs of her daughter to Jesus,

And Jesus acted on account of her persistent faith.

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## **DIFFERENT WAYS OF JESUS RESPONDING/HEALING**

So there are these different ways of people being brought to Jesus.

But then notice as well there are different ways of Jesus working in response.

Both time we end up with a miraculous healing or deliverance,

But there's quite a contrast between the two isn't there?

In the first instance,

Did you notice how Jesus never even came into contact with the little girl?

The miracle was done at a distance,

With simple and undramatic words,

*'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.'*

And that's it,

All done.

There was some drama in the woman making her request and the struggle there,

But when it comes to the healing itself it's fairly uneventful.

But then in the next account it's almost the opposite.

There's not much of note that happens in the people bringing the man to Jesus,

But in the healing itself there are all sorts of strange and wonderful details!

Jesus puts his fingers into his ears!

His saliva is somehow involved!

He touches the man's tongue.

He sighs,

He looks to heaven,

He speaks this word which must have been so memorable Mark gives it to us in the original language,

***'Ephphatha!'***

What a contrast!

Whereas with the Syrophonecian woman's daughter it was a simple word at a distance,

Here with this man Jesus is up close and personal, to put it mildly,

He's physical to the point of discomfort,

He's even dramatic, in a sense.

So why these contrasting ways of carrying out his work?

We can hazard some guesses of course.

For example,

For a deaf man who couldn't hear the words of Jesus,

It must have been especially significant to experience the physical touch of Jesus.

But perhaps another more general point we can take away from this contrast,

Is the reality that the work of God in people's lives does happen in many and varied ways.

I think of the way in which some people have quite spectacular conversion experiences,

When St Monica was praying fervently for her wayward son Augustine,  
His conversion happened quite dramatically and memorably.

But then you have another person like C.S. Lewis,  
For whom the process was more drawn out,

Where his final stage was sort of almost reluctantly admitting that God must be God.

Two great Christian figures,

People praying for them both,

People bringing them to Jesus in various ways,

But God's quite different ways of working in their lives.

So it is in your life,

So it is in the lives of those for whom we pray.

Our Lord encourages us to come to him with the needs of others,

He promises to hear us,

He promises to act.

But the *how* and the *when* is another story,

We leave that in God's hands.

And sometimes we don't even get to see what he's up to,

Notice what Jesus did with the deaf man,

He took him away in private to do his work.

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## **THE ONE WHO DOES EVERYTHING WELL**

Dear friends in Christ,



Left on our own,

We aren't in such a different situation than the Syrophonecian woman's daughter with the unclean spirit,

For as we heard Jesus say last week just before this text,

It's out of our hearts that flow all manner of evil,  
And so make **us** unclean.

We aren't in such a different situation than the man who is deaf and unable to speak,

For left on our own,  
our ears remained closed to the God who would speak to us,

Our tongues remain tied in a lack of thanksgiving and praise to the one who made us.

Left on your own,  
you are under the captivity of sin, death and the power of the devil,

And you are unable even to get yourself to Jesus who is the only source of healing.

But thanks be to God,

You have been **brought** to him,  
In one way or another,

You have been brought to the one who,  
as the crowds say,  
'*has done everything well*'.

This is the one whose journey has taken him to Tyre outside Israel,  
Back '*by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis*',

But whose journey is ultimately heading to Jerusalem,

To the cross,

Where he will give his life as a ransom,

Not just for the Syrophonecian woman's daughter in her captivity,

Not just for the deaf man in his captivity,

But for all in their captivity to sin, death and the devil,

For **you**.

For many of you, you were brought you to the waters of holy baptism in infancy,  
In your helplessness,

For others,  
You were brought as adults by friends,  
Family,  
Pastors and sponsors,

And no matter how old you were,  
There in baptism you were washed of of your uncleanness,

You were forgiven your sins,  
Given the gift of eternal life,

And these same words in our text were spoken over you,

*'Be opened – Ephaphahta – that you may hear and speak the word of God'.*

Jesus got up close and personal with this man,  
Fingers in ears and mouths,  
Saliva even,

And in your baptism Jesus got up close and personal with you,  
With those healing waters running over your head.

Still today he gets up close and personal with you,

To deliver you the grace and mercy we all so desperately need,

Not his finger on our tongues,

But bread and wine on our tongue,  
His very body and blood,

Again bringing you forgiveness,  
Life and salvation.

'He has done everything well',  
And he's done it *for you*.

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## **CONCLUSION**

So often in the Gospels,  
People bring others to Jesus.

Let's give thanks to God,

For all those people he has used in our lives to bring us to Jesus.

And let's consider today,

**Who** and **how**,  
God be calling us to bring others to Jesus,

The one who has done everything well.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.