

Homily for the 23<sup>rd</sup> sun. in Ord. "B"  
Sept. 5-6, 2009

I want to share with you a true story.

Mary, which is not her real name, lived in another state with her four school-age children. She was divorced but dating a man twenty years older than her. He was a Christian. He quoted Scripture often and always bought Mary little gifts to show her how much he loved her. But when he drank, things changed.

One day after the children got home from school, Mary went to the grocery store. When she arrived home, her boyfriend was there, drunk and accusing her of being out with another man. The children were inside the house but they heard the shouting outside and watched through the front window.

Despite Mary's denials, her boyfriend got more violent. He got in her face, cussing and threatening her. At the height of the argument, he pushed Mary against the car, the groceries spilling onto the driveway. All that the children could see was the helplessness and shame in Mary's face.

She refused to let him into the house again, but that was not the last of him. The next weekend, Mary received a phone call. He was drunk, threatening her life and the life of her children. When he arrived at the house later that night, he pounded on the doors, yelling and waking everyone in the house as well as many of the neighbors. If it were not for the neighbors who broke into his truck at this time and took his shotguns, Mary and her children would be another statistic today.

This story has several endings. The first is that Mary got back together with her boyfriend after he apologized and promised to be better. But he got drunk again many times and

threatened the children many times. But Mary's fear of being alone made her deaf to God's call to her to be strong and fear not. She lived in fear for many years and her children and her family lived in fear.

Another ending is that Mary broke up with her boyfriend but chose another who was no better than the first. But she was so afraid of being alone. She was willing to sacrifice the wellbeing of her children for a chance that someone would make her happy. But because of her fear and her lack of confidence in her worthiness she could not think with clarity or wisdom. No not one could make her happy.

The last ending is that Mary broke up with her boyfriend. She started school, and got involved in the life of her Parish. She was still lonely, but she was determined to know the strength and the grace that comes from a relationship with God and His people. She heard God's call to be strong and fear not.

She became confident and after her kids were out of school, she eventually met a man who she became best friends with. After she was sure of the virtue and the character of this man she married him. She lived happily with this man and her children grew to love and respect him.

She had to wait for a happy marriage but the waiting and God's grace helped her to discern what was right and good. The strength of her relationship with God allowed her to choose in wisdom. It wasn't easy to wait, but it was right and good.

Unfortunately the first two endings are the most usual and the most common. Maybe it's because we don't believe that God really has much interest in our lives. We remain deaf to his call to **fear not and be strong**. We cannot hear that God is near us and loves us. So we desperately make choices that we think will fill the emptiness of our lives. But only the grace and

strength that comes from knowing God could give us knowledge of our true dignity and therefore give us the means to be happy.

The readings we hear today call out to us, if we could only listen to what they say. We can so often be like that deaf and mute man who could not hear God's call to the deepest part of his heart. We fear loneliness, loss of status, loss of security, and loss of wealth. Loneliness anxiety and fear can rule our lives. We can't speak to others about the strength and dignity God gives to us in Christ because we don't really believe it; because we have never stopped to listen to His call.

The irony is that Christ's voice is here all around us; His hand outstretched and His healing touch waiting for us. But we are blind and deaf to it. We keep looking for something shinier, and noisier. And so we remain empty, broken and crippled.

But through the sacraments of the Church, Jesus takes us aside and heals us if we will go with Him.

Not simply by theoretical ideas or good feelings, but by a personal encounter. That is why the Sacrament of Confession is His gift to the Church. That is why the individual confession of sin and receiving of absolution is so powerful and important. This is how Jesus takes us aside and speaks to us personally and lays his hands upon us so that we will hear the words that will make us strong and allow us to know our dignity and strength.

That is why we receive Communion as individuals. That is why each of us says Amen singly. It is our response to what Jesus is offering to us. He offers us His friendship which fills the lonely emptiness of our hearts. He offers us His love which allows us to see our worth and dignity as His children.

Jesus knows each of us personally. He knows what we struggle with and he wants us to respond to His love for us by choosing to love him in return.

We all want to be happy. We all want to be free of the burden of doubt about our self worth. We all want to find love and communion. The trouble is that we don't know where to find that. We won't find it in drugs, alcohol, sexual promiscuity or in wealth. But our culture shouts those things in our ears. We don't know who to listen to.

But Christ speaks the words of truth about who we are and what we were created for. He teaches us what real love is and what our real worth is. By choosing to listen to His words, and by choosing to see ourselves as his Sister or brother we will find joy, happiness and our elusive dignity.

Jesus heals us with his own person. He does not heal us by magic or by some theological theory, but by his hands touching us just as he touched the deaf mute man in the Gospel we just heard.

This is what the Sacramental life of the Church is all about; to know and to feel the touch of God in our lives.

Life is difficult and confusing at times. For some it seems like life is one disaster after another. We desperately want to find happiness. But we so often are deaf to the one place where our happiness is a sure thing. That place is here at this altar where we come to know heart and the love of Jesus, and hear His words and feel His touch.

Be strong, fear not.