

## From The Pastor

Faith is not always easy. We think of faith as an important attribute in life that is positive and life giving, and indeed, it is. Still, it is not always easy. Faith is a relationship with a person; the divine person of God. Relationships can be difficult, as we all know. It takes time to develop trust, and build a readiness to yield to the word and goodness of another person.

Often we may think of faith more as a possession. I have faith. I believe in God, and I practice the ways of God in my religion. I try to do the right things and follow the ways of God; therefore, my faith is in right order. True and living faith cannot be wrapped up into a neat little frame of behavior and expectation, and held as a possession to be taken out and used in times of need, like a sweater on a chilly morning. Faith as a living relationship of trust and hope will have its times of surety, as well as its times of doubt and fear. Fear in the face of trial is not a lack of faith, but rather a human emotion that can be addressed by faith. Some things are worth being afraid of, yet are also an opportunity to exercise the relationship of faith in the face of trial. Faith unchallenged and not exercised with the vulnerability of risk and the hope of a confident trust, as in any human relationship, is not really faith at all.

Part of the challenge of faith is that we have come to believe in what works. I believe in my car because it works when I need it. I believe in my cell phone, computer, and my blackberry because they work. When such things fail to work, I get rid of them and get something that does work. Faith is not like that. Faith is a living trust in things hoped for, but as yet are unseen.

What is the faith of the man in the gospel who is deaf and mute? Who is this man, and how did he get this way? Who was he after his ears and mouth had been opened by Jesus? Perhaps the more poignant question, what was the faith of the people who brought this man to Jesus?

It seems that in this case, hope preceded faith. There was more hope than faith because they did not know who Jesus really was, only that they saw and heard that he could heal. They did not yet know him to believe in him, but they hoped, on behalf of their beloved friend, that Jesus would heal him like the others. They acted on their hope. They asked, and to that extent, they believed. They took the risk and the vulnerability of facing possible rejection by Jesus, or that Jesus could not heal this man. How often do people today fail to seek healing in the name of Jesus for fear of rejection or the possibility of disappointment? The answer is many. Many people resist, or even reject the possibility of asking for healing even though they say they believe in Jesus. Why is this?

The short answer is faith. We believe, but we resist the risk to trust. Some resist healing for fear it may not work, and they do not want to face that disappointment on top of the pain of whatever the ailment might be. Such a disappointment may leave them questioning their faith. Is it my fault that I was not healed? Why would God not do this favor for me, or for my friend whom I love so much? Am I unworthy of God's favor?

Be aware that I write this with every sensitivity. These are very normal and frequent human emotions and questions so many of us have about God, ourselves, and our faith. Such emotions are not wrong. My point is to inspire the trust of faith in the vulnerable realities we will all inevitably face. Jesus himself faced his fear of the Cross in the Garden of Gethsemane, calling on the Father for rescue. In the end, Jesus surrendered with trust in the Father's providential love. In his risk, in the face of his fears, we are blest with the gift of redemption. In death, Resurrection became the final healing. Faith can be very messy at times, but in the end bears its fruit.

Sometimes we resist healing out of pride, or denial of our vulnerability. God is so ready and so willing to heal and rescue us. It is vulnerable to ask for help. It is also very human, and essential. To ask for healing is, pure and simple, a deep act of faith. I believe that God always hears our prayers and always answers. Why some healings come exactly as we want them and others do not, I do not know. Some of the greatest healings are invisible, known at the time only to God and the soul. God has a mind and a will for us. God's wisdom is always beyond ours. A healing may be emotional, spiritual, or psychological when we wanted something physical. God has a way for us all, and sometimes it hurts. Faith is trust in the love of God, not in the emotions of our expectations.

The healing of the mute/deaf man is a powerful story of compassion and divine healing. It can be trusted. Yield to a living faith that can risk the possibility of failure. Jesus did, and we were all saved by it.

Thank you to all who sent gifts, cards, and greetings for my birthday. I am very grateful for your kindness and good wishes. The picnic is next weekend. Please join us! Please support the Parish Raffle. Thursday evening at 7:30 there will be an Intergenerational Healing Mass. All are welcome.

Father John Esper

