

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: Romans 10:9-17; St. Mark 7:31-37

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

All faithful worship begins with confession. Yet, as we appear before God, what is it we are to confess? Only that which we believe in our heart. Therefore, *“The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the Word of faith which we preach): if you confess with your mouth the LORD JESUS and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*”

So, do you believe in your heart you are a sinner in need of salvation? Do you believe you need a savior? Then do not falter, but confess JESUS CHRIST, and God, who is faithful and just, will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Then *“Sing aloud to God our strength. Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob”* (Alleluia Verse) and tell everyone what He has done. For this is the purpose for which God has come in human flesh—that you be saved and live with Him in righteousness and blessedness forever.

Therefore, confess CHRIST before men that He may confess you before God the FATHER and His angels. *“For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”* Do not hesitate, for we are condemned by sins of both commission and omission, by what we have done or by what have left undone, sins of both word and deed.

Confess CHRIST JESUS, for this is the laudable service for which we prayed in the Collect. There is no greater service than to confess that He is God and we are not. There is no greater need than ours for a savior, and there is no greater Gospel than this: that our LORD God forgives *all* sin because JESUS CHRIST, HIS SON, died for *all* mankind.

When made publicly, such confession serves to bless not only the one making the confession, but is among the greatest of services a Christian can perform for the love of one’s neighbor. For how *“shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’”* Therefore, let your praise for God be continually in your mouth—this is true and laudable service to our LORD.

For faith is not born in your heart that it may grow stale on your tongue and die on your lips. Your faith is given wings that it may fly to the four corners of the earth to be shared with every man, woman, and child. If this were not so, then why did our LORD command: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the FATHER and of the SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded*

you...”? We are called by our LORD to not only live a new life in Him, but to call others to do the same; not only this, but in active service born of a living faith, to bring them to Him as well.

Repent! For far too long you have allowed your faith to be mute. If the Apostles had obeyed CHRIST’s call in the same way you do, you would, each and every one of you, still be dead in your sins.

We have been deaf to God’s call which He has given through the voice of His SPIRIT for the sake of His SON. We, every one of us, have been mute in our prayers, our confession, and our praise. The empty seats of our pews bear witness against us. If God desired, if it were His will, He could cause the rocks and stones to shout and sing His praise. Yet, this He has not done. Instead, He has given us ears with which to hear, eyes with which to see, and tongues with which to sing and confess all that our hearts know and believe. For what other purposes would He have loosed our tongues and opened our ears?

You see, God does not need your praise, nor does He need your confession; with, or without them, He is God. Still, He opened your ears that you may hear and believe, and He loosed your tongue that you may confess and share the Good News of salvation with your neighbor that he or she too, may be brought to faith.

Far too often, we seem to believe that our faith is enough, that all that counts is our personal relationship with CHRIST, and undoubtedly, when it comes to your salvation, this is most certainly true. Yet, faith produces good works as the evidence that one’s faith is not dead but alive, and there is no greater work for a Christian than to bring that Good News to your friends and loved ones—in short, to your neighbor—that they too may hear, believe, and confess that JESUS CHRIST is LORD.

Or perhaps you live under the mistaken notion that such evangelism, such sharing of the Good News of salvation in CHRIST, is strictly for pastors to perform? If so, then perhaps you have forgotten Saint Peter’s words where he writes, *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light....”*

What then is the sharing of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST with your neighbors if it is not your priestly duty, and if it is, then why are you reluctant to do just that, or do you truly believe that such is only a pastor’s vocation? Would you have the Church return to the days when the Church of Rome ruled Christians with an iron fist, not even allowing them to read Sacred Scripture in their own language while her Pope and her priests lorded over the people keeping them in ignorance? God forbid! God has opened the ears and hearts of His people that they may believe, and He has loosed their tongues that they may confess and sing His praise unto all the earth.

For the salvation wrought by the innocent suffering and death of our LORD JESUS is not a message to be kept under a basket as though one can keep such Good News to oneself. It is a message that is meant to be shared—to be confessed at all times and in all places to all the

world. To do less is to despise the gift of forgiveness so freely given at such an immeasurable cost. For this gift was bought at a price. Not with gold and silver, but with our LORD's precious Body and Blood, given and shed for each of you, and yet, not for you alone, but for every man, woman, and child in every place and every generation. Who are you then, O Christian, to keep such Good News to yourself?

We, each and every one of us, are guilty of not speaking when we should, and speaking far too much when we should remain silent. No one speaks by accident. Nor is it by accident that one remains silent. Rather, our words, or our lack of words, betray what truly abides in our hearts *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."* On the Day of Judgment every man, woman, and child shall give an account for every word that passes his or her lips, and just as surely, for every word that should have been spoken, but died in one's heart.

This is the unhappy truth. We all suffer from the effects of sin so that our hearts are deaf to the voice of God and our stammering tongues are reluctant to pray, praise, and give thanks; we all suffer from an aversion to confess our sins *and* our faith—especially to our neighbors. You may well ask, *"Who then can be saved?"* A question to which our LORD answered: *"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

You see, in the end, it is not your words that save you but the Words and sacrifice of our LORD. Our LORD's sacrifice shatters the chains that bind you, opening your ears that you may hear and believe His Word, and loosens your tongue that you may make confession.

At the Baptismal font JESUS said to you, *"Ephphatha,"* that is, *"Be opened."* and by water and the SPIRIT, He released you from sin, death, and the silence of the grave that you may hear and confess Him as LORD and be saved. At the font, JESUS reached out to touch the very core of your need—your deaf ears, your stammering tongue, your stiff neck, and your rock-hard heart. At the font, He set you apart from the multitude of sinners to make of you a fellow heir of heaven, with all its glory, where His SPIRIT eternally intercedes for you before our FATHER in heaven *"with groanings which cannot be uttered."*

At the Baptismal font, our LORD took into Himself all the things which cause you to groan—pain, loneliness, sickness, sorrow, death—all that Satan uses in his attempt to bind and imprison you. At His holy altar, JESUS takes from Himself and pours into you His precious atoning Blood even as He places His Flesh upon your tongue to strengthen you *"against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness,"* who seek to enslave you.

JESUS came to make all things whole. He came to destroy death with His death, to recreate creation in the image of His FATHER. In His death and resurrection, JESUS has brought the imaginings of Satan to nothing and released your tongue to speak plainly and joyfully about our God's immeasurable goodness. Now you can go forth with the multitudes proclaiming salvation in JESUS to all who have ears to hear—to confess, *"[JESUS] has done all things well."*

Know now, that already, this very morning, JESUS has put His fingers into your ears in *“the Word of faith which we preach”* in order that you are able to hear, and in hearing, *“you may believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name.”*

So come! JESUS Himself has invited you to receive the salvation He offers. He is inviting you to open your mouth that He can touch your tongue and place there His very own Body and Blood. With these He says to you, *“Ephphatha!”* Be *completely* opened! For JESUS has something wonderful He desperately wants you to hear—His merciful words of benediction and absolution— *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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