

As I was praying with Jesus' words from the Gospel today, I thought of a really beautiful video I once saw on YouTube. The video is of a young woman named Sarah who has been deaf all her life hearing her own voice for the first time.

It starts with a technician seated across from her adjusting the device attached to the side of her head. She is obviously experienced with this equipment. She moves back and forth from Sarah's device to her computer, making final adjustments. Then comes the moment when Sarah hears for the first time. Her whole face lights up and she is overwhelmed. Sobs of uncontainable joy escape from her mouth as she hears herself crying and the technician talking to her. It is such a beautiful thing to watch.

Before that moment, a whole realm of reality was unavailable to Sarah, but then, through the marvelous miracle of a cochlear implant, she was able to experience it for the first time. It is a thing to behold. I have watched it many times, as have some 34 million other people on YouTube.

This moment mirrors the truth that Jesus speaks to the Apostles and gathered crowds today in John's Gospel. As you may remember, we are making a journey in our Sunday readings through the sixth chapter of John's Gospel known as the Bread of Life Discourse. This portion that we just heard is the tail end of that teaching and shows us the reaction of those who have been listening to Jesus' teaching.

Last Sunday we would have heard Jesus speaking of the necessity of eating his flesh and drinking His blood in order to have life and to inherit eternal life. Instead, we celebrated the Solemnity of the Assumption, so those readings were replaced by ones relating to Mary, whom we were celebrating. But now we return to John chapter six and the crowds are at a breaking point. They say to Jesus: "This saying is hard; who can accept it."

In response, Jesus tells all of us the key to accepting his teaching on the Eucharist: the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He says to those crowds and to us: "It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." Here, Jesus tells us that in order to accept His teaching, we need to rely not on what our senses tell us or our own human wisdom. This isn't going to cut it.

Throughout the history of the Church, this teaching has been a challenge for people. It still challenges us. It is hard because it forces us not rely on our own understanding and insight, but to open up our hearts and minds to faith, to grace, to that working of the Holy Spirit in our innermost being to bring us to new knowledge.

Nothing we could do on a human level would allow us to grasp what Jesus invites them and us to believe. There is no way to fully wrap our minds around the fact that when we receive what looks like bread and wine, we are in fact receiving Jesus himself, fully God and fully man. But this is how God has chosen to work. His ways are not our ways. We will never fully be able to grasp the enormity of Who we receive hidden under common, unremarkable appearances. But God can give our minds the capability to enter into the great mystery. Throughout history, the saints have done just that, aided by God's grace.

Saint Thomas Aquinas penned a gorgeous hymn to Jesus in the Eucharist called the Pange Lingua. Here are a couple of the verses, translated into English:

Word made Flesh, by word he maketh
Very bread his Flesh to be;
Man in wine Christ's Blood partaketh:
And if senses fail to see,
Faith alone the true heart waketh
To behold the mystery.

Therefore we, before him bending,
This great Sacrament revere;
Types and shadows have their ending,
For the newer rite is here;
Faith, our outward sense befriending,
Makes the inward vision clear.

In both of these verses, St. Thomas poetically points to the fact that we need God's help to recognize the splendor of Jesus in the Eucharist. He says: "Faith alone the true heart waketh / To behold the mystery," and "Faith, our outward sense befriending, / Makes the inward vision clear." He, along with the other great Saints of the church, knew that through faith, we could come to experience

the greatness of Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist. Faith given us by the Holy Spirit allows the eyes of our hearts to recognize what flesh alone misses--"it is the spirit that gives life, while flesh is of no avail."

In this way, faith is like that cochlear implant for Sarah. As she was unable to hear without the help of that technology; we are unable to recognize the truth of Jesus' real presence with us in the Eucharist without the help of God's grace. It is all too easy to be like those in the crowd who left Jesus, but the great news is that the Holy Spirit is so ready to help us at every moment.

When we open ourselves up to His help, His abundant grace, it allows us to be like Peter and all of those who have put their faith in Jesus throughout the history of the Church. The Holy Spirit allowed Peter to say, with confidence, even when others were walking away: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God." With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can have that same faith in who Jesus is and what He teaches us, that still today He gives us his very Self in the Eucharist to give us true life and prepare us for Heaven.

My prayer is that today all of us open our hearts either for the first time or in a fresh way to the invisible but very real power of the Holy Spirit that we might enter more fully into the mystery of the Eucharist together. When we do this, we can become people who draw others to faith so that they can also experience the great power of this Sacrament! So let us pray now for God's grace.

+ Heavenly Father, thank you for drawing us to your Son that we might be fed by Him in the Eucharist. Jesus, thank you for reminding that it is only through the Holy Spirit that we can recognize the reality of what You give us at the altar. Thank you for the words of eternal life that You give us. Come Holy Spirit, open our hearts in faith to Jesus so that we might recognize Him with us here in the Eucharist! We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen. +