

Homily. 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.B. 30/31 January 2021.

Respected and honoured Senior Australian of the Year, indigenous teacher and Catholic Dr. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann has, through her work, paintings, speeches, writings and example, shown to us the importance of listening deeply to each other before we speak and act.

Conversely, urgency and action are characteristics that pervade every page and scene of St. Mark's gospel. In each chapter and verse something is happening, someone is needing help, people are wanting food and drink while others are drawing close to Jesus so as to hear His teaching. Mark tells us that this constant coming and going wore the disciples out, so much so that Jesus took them away to a quiet place so that they could find time to eat and rest. Yet, in all of this hubbub the one person who was never rushed or overwhelmed was Jesus. Right to His end when there was nothing more to do He said little but giving out a loud cry and breathing over His spirit. In Jesus what we detect is a clear attentive focus and calmness in all of the many storms that came His way during His public life and ministry.

There was drama, noise and work to be done even in the Synagogue at Capernaum, which He entered so as to pray and teach the local people. A man possessed with an unclean spirit, a broken body, mind and soul, started yelling out, upsetting proceedings and everyone present. However, Mark tells us that Jesus was not perturbed. Staying in control, He sharply ordered the spirit to leave the man. It did so instantly, with some dramatic convulsions and another loud cry.

Picture this scene taking place in our Church right now. How would we feel? How would we react? I suspect with a great deal of unease and embarrassment if not some horror, even anger, at having our gathering so disrupted. I'm certain that those in the Capernaum Synagogue reacted similarly, but Jesus didn't. He remained focused. He listened to the words of the disturbed man, saw to the root of his problem and then with confidence and calmness set about making him both whole and free. It was this listening attentiveness that led the people to exclaim 'Here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it.'

Authority of the sort that Jesus had, that our Senior Australian of the Year teaches and practices and that we desire comes from listening to what is really being said, reading rightly what is intended and needed within the babble of noise and interference, and then focusing ourselves on helping others in the best possible way become the best they can possibly be.

If we were all about ourselves such deep, true listening simply isn't possible. Our own self-generated noise of neediness quickly blocks out any hope of calm attentiveness. This is why real listening is the most unselfish act of service we can offer. It's utterly focused on giving to others, which Jesus always was even to His dying for us and for our salvation. This is the Lord we celebrate and welcome into ourselves in our Eucharist today so that we might grow in His peace, wisdom and servant-like heart.