

Celie loved balloons, and for her birthday she got a big bright red one. She loved to hold it, to press it with her fingers, she loved to smell its new-balloon smell. Her father tied a string to the end of the balloon. She bounced it against the bedroom wall, she bounced it against the tv, and she bounced it against the lamp. But only once. When it hit the lamp, the balloon went pop. Celie cried. Dragging the string to her father, she said the only three words she knew would help the situation, "Fix it, Daddy."

There's a problem with Celie's request. Her father won't fix the balloon in the way she has in mind--He might fix it by buying another or just holding her a while. Their relationship is not based on the balloon, it's based on something deeper, their love.

If there's a problem with Celie's request, there's often a problem with our prayer. When accidents happen, when people mistreat us, when someone we love walks away, we turn to God and pray, "Fix it. Make it the way it was again." It's a prayer that can put God on the spot. It makes God look like a genie in a bottle whose wish is our command, but it may well be a prayer God wants to answer. God's dilemma is how to answer the request without making people think God's only is to patch up problems.

This is the dilemma Jesus faces in the Gospel. Some people bring him a deaf-mute and ask him to cure the man. Jesus is caught. He wants to cure the sick person, but his real message is something deeper--conversion of heart. If word gets out that Jesus works miracles, people may be distracted from the core message: "Change your hearts and believe in the Gospel." So he strikes a bargain. He cures the deaf-mute and tells the people to keep quiet about it. He lets the mute speak, but makes the crowd silent.

The problem that often comes up in our prayer is that we imagine God is the one who must change things. But the Gospel message is that we must change our hearts. And if we've got the message wrong, Jesus asks us to keep silent.

But when from our weakness we begin to grow in the Spirit, we must speak the Gospel with full confidence. Life teaches us about God and we tell others those lessons.

Next Sunday we'll have voter-registration here at the parish and throughout the diocese. If you're new to the area or have never registered to vote, we want to make it as easy as possible for you to do so. If you are an active voter, I hope this project will rekindle your interest.

Jesus entrusted to us responsibility for the community. He calls us now to show that care for one another. We can all strive to know the candidates, to know the issues. If anyone is to fix a broken world, we will fix it, with the help of God.