



It sounds exhausting! But as I followed the interactions on this hermit forum I could see the same process taking place: the quiet repetitions of sane and balanced spirituality, the confident, gentle assertions of study and experience – it was like the drip of water on stone, and slowly it began to etch the surface, to reshape the unyielding, to gently reveal to them their own preparedness for change.

Too often, and especially in recent times, change can appear as a sudden and dramatic, even traumatic event, leaving us uncomprehending and incoherent with confusion and distress. But Jesus' touch in today's Gospel is gentle, intimate: he invites us to go to a quiet place with him away from the crowds, to grow and change in his care. "And his ears were opened... and he spoke clearly." Ephphatha. Be opened.

FIRST STEPS

Sometimes the signs of longed-for growth and of change in our own lives are barely discernible, and it is only in hindsight that we can look back and see how far we have come. Fear of not making progress can prevent us from taking the first small, tentative steps of conversion. As we begin this Season of Creation – this celebration of growth and change – we pray that the words of today's reading from Isaiah may begin their quiet work of conversion on us: that "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed... the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy".

For more information on the Season of Creation: <https://seasonofcreation.org>

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

You are just, O Lord, and your judgement is right;
treat your servant in accord with your merciful love.

FIRST READING Isaiah 35:4-7

PSALM Psalm 145

RESPONSE **My soul, give praise to the Lord.**

Or **Alleluia!**

- 1. It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever, who is just to those who are oppressed. It is he who gives bread to the hungry, the Lord, who sets prisoners free. R.**
- 2. It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind, who raises up those who are bowed down, the Lord, who loves the just, the Lord, who protects the stranger. R.**

3. The Lord upholds the widow and orphan, but thwarts the path of the wicked. The Lord will reign for ever, Zion's God, from age to age. R.

SECOND READING James 2:1-5

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom, and cured all kinds of sickness among the people.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Mark 7:31-37

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God; my soul is thirsting for God, the living God.

Next Sunday's Readings:

Isaiah 50:5-9
 James 2:14-18
 Mark 8:27-35

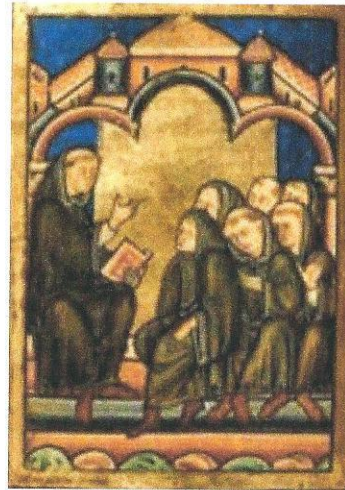


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GROWTH

Over the next few weeks, we will be celebrating the Season of Creation – a World Council of Churches initiative endorsed by Pope Francis and described as "a time to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion, and commitment together". Twelfth-century illuminations and excerpts from the story of St Cuthbert's life, written by St Bede, will be used as exemplars and illustrations in this series. Cuthbert lived in Northumbria during the seventh century. His roots were in Celtic Christianity. He was a monk, hermit and bishop.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the deaf man, "Ephphatha... Be opened." We cannot flourish, we cannot grow without change. How to be open to change?



Odd as it may seem, there are a growing number of online forums for those interested in the way of hermitage, the eremitical life. They are populated by the sincere, the committed, the tourists and, of course, the kindly eccentric. It is perhaps characteristic of these groups that the eccentric people are often the most voluble; they seem to have a lot they need to say! One of these forums was recently joined by a mature and well-established diocesan hermit from Stillsong in the USA, who was prepared to spend time carefully explaining and guiding the less experienced, and debunking some of the myths expounded by the most eccentric.

I was reminded by her approach of the story of St Cuthbert who, when appointed prior of a rather lacklustre monastery, used to hold daily conferences with the monks in an effort to reform them. He would teach them patiently until the rebellious mutterings from the back of the room became too noisy, then he would simply up and leave and go about his business for the day. St Bede writes: "When he was fatigued by the bitter taunts of those who opposed him, he would rise from his seat with a placid look, and dismiss the meeting until the following day, when, as if he had suffered no repulse, he would use the same exhortations as before, until he converted them."

Season of Creation



Today we begin a new series for the Church's Season of Creation, which begins on 1 September each year. Rachel Denton is a diocesan hermit and has written these pieces from her urban hermitage, which is dedicated to St Cuthbert.

5 SEPTEMBER 2021

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III