

Deaf People need access to Bible

Many Deaf people do not have regular access to input such as the weekly Sunday Eucharistic services, sermons, television and radio religious broadcasts, debates on religious issues, and general conversations and chats on issues relating to religion, faith, worship and Church teaching. Some of the lucky ones have access to the weekly or monthly services in sign language, and to events (conferences, seminars, religious workshops, prayer sessions etc). At one of our weekend Conferences in the early 1990s, I was leading a workshop when one of the Deaf adults corrected me saying that there were twelve, not eleven, apostles. It transpired that although he knew some of the Gospel stories well, he was flabbergasted when he discovered the story about Judas and how he hanged himself. Such gaps in their knowledge of biblical stories is typical among many Deaf people.

Lack of access and information can not only lead to misunderstanding but have a dangerous warped view of truth. I remember, in the days before subtitles appeared on our television screens, I used to hate television. I used to see some Deaf people who watched and were absorbed by the television programmes. When I asked what it was that so fascinated them, they gave their own versions of the story of the film they were watching. What bits they understood were added and constructed by their own imagining. However laudable this may be, I think it can be a dangerous conjectural exercise as the truths constructed from their imagining were often not in conformity with the truth itself but partly warped or twisted by their own

prevarications. This leads to poor informed consciences, without having regard to the consequences of what would eventually happen. This could lead to a lack of real understanding of the true values of life.

Knowledge and information give power. Power enables the person to become the person s/he is called to be by God. The story of the deaf man in Mark 7:34 is not simply about restoration of hearing. It is about enabling him to have a new understanding of who he is, his role and contribution to the community and theirs to him. 'Ephphata' meaning 'be opened', being open to the mystery of God's presence in the world and in other people.

To know God, we need to turn to interiority because the answer does not merely come by looking or examining something external or by reading Church's teachings or Church's rules. Receiving the Word of God in Church, whether by listening or looking at BSL signers, is hardly sufficient; everybody needs to read the Bible daily in the quiet and solitude of their home. Hearing people read the Bible. Deaf people 'read' the Bible in their language BSL. The DVD of Mark's gospel will be a vital step in enabling Deaf people to know the Bible and thus avoid fragmentation, alienation and discrimination.

Peter McDonough

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The language of the Bible becomes Sign Language