

Pastor's column 23rd Sunday 2021

J R Tolkien and his friend C S Lewis, both shared a love of mythology. They understood that many of the old myths provided maps of meaning by which to understand human life. They also understood that the Holy Spirit was whispering intimations of truth through these stories. It was his love of mythology that provided the back drop to C S Lewis' conversion to Christianity, when he understood that Jesus' story of the dying and rising God, was not only mythic, but happened, and was Truth Himself (as the Irish would say - Lewis was originally from Belfast). One of the well known Greek myths concerns the story of Pandora, the first woman, formed by Hephaestus in response to Prometheus stealing fire from the God's and bringing it to earth. Zeus sends Prometheus's brother, Epimetheus, to marry Pandora, to whom he's given the sealed urn, with the mandate not to open it. Pandora's curiosity gets the better of her and lifts the lid and peeks into the urn (later known as "Pandora's box"). Out fly all manner of evils, including plague, to afflict humankind. She quickly reseals the urn, trapping the last of its contents, which is hope. One of the "signs of the times" is a general pessimism whose roots are found in agnostic, atheistic or even nihilistic world views. These "world views" are devoid of hope, as it is sealed in "Pandora's box." The antidote, the panacea, the elixir of life, their hearts still yearn for, is found in today's Gospel - not a myth, but both mythic and true- words and actions Jesus truly spoke and did. The key to understanding the significance of Jesus healing the deaf and mute man, is to be found in the first reading from the Prophet Isaiah and also from God's mission-ing of Moses. Isaiah says, "Courage! Do not be afraid. Look your God is coming.....Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed.....and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy..." And in Exodus 4: 11, God says to Moses, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" Mark, who only reports this healing, is wanting us to understand Who is acting here, God, and Jesus is God!. Jesus heals in a shamanistic way, through touch and a common practice by Jewish and pagan healers, using his spittle. As he does so, he looks up to heaven - a gesture of prayer and groans- indicative of not only power going out of him, but of him taking on himself the suffering of this man. Jesus does this miracle after taking the man away from the crowd. He treats the suffering man individually and with sensitivity. Jesus is not an entertaining showman. No doubt Peter accompanied them and was impressed by what Jesus did. Mark effectively is the scribe telling Peters' recollections. On seeing the deaf-mute cured, the crowd are awestruck. Jesus is restoring the fallen creation and anticipating the Messianic age, as alluded to by them saying, "He has done all things well, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak." Timing as we know is so important for Jesus, and he tries to dissuade the crowd from publicising what they have witnessed, as it is not his hour, (as St John would say). Jesus is God, God in the flesh and he demonstrates this by his healing power. His name embodies his essence and mission - Yeshua-God saves. In spite of the evils released from Pandora's box, through the sin of our first parents, hope has not been sealed. Jesus, the God-man has overcome sin, Satan and death and has unleashed hope, because the simple truth is: Christian's won't stay dead.