

In today's Sunday Mass readings a deaf and dumb man is given the gift of hearing and speech - chosen from among many, no doubt, to be healed to the glory of God acting through his Christ. And in James' letter it's made very clear that anyone may be subject to God's choice - there is to be no distinction among Christians between the rich and the poor, the well-dressed and the shabby. And this theme of God's freedom of choice in the story of our salvation is especially marked in today's feast of Our Lady's birthday - one might say indeed that her birthday, and ours, is the day she is chosen to be the mother of the Christ child, and one might then also say that the day that Joseph decides to adopt the future child Jesus as his own is also the day of his own adoption as a child of Christ, playing on the word adoption in both its active sense to choose and the passive sense of being chosen. So there's an interplay of freedoms at work here which reveals and enables our existence as children of God. Elsewhere it's made very clear that Christ, that God, chooses us and we do not choose ourselves to be followers of Christ, children of God, but that's only to preserve the absolute priority of God in our human story. None of this takes place without grace, without God's permissive will. And yet the marvel is that that will operates in the most unlikely places through, by our standards, the most unlikely people. We cannot second-guess God in this process of adoption, and nor will a blood test prove a continuous line of descent, for the gene pool God works with is universal - it all goes back in this sense to Adam and indeed to that very first spark of life - in whatever form that was - none of us can pull rank on one another when it comes to this process of adoption. This is as true of Mary and Joseph and Jesus as any one else. That's the whole point of the genealogy of Matthew's gospel which we hear today in the celebration of Mary's adoption as the mother of God, of Joseph's adoption as his legal father and of Jesus' adoption as their legal son - a son of David and son of Abraham after all. It could have been a near miss if God hadn't chosen Mary and Joseph as his candidates - they could have said "no" but God knows his choices better than they know themselves. And this is true for us too. We may at times think we have no place in God's scheme of things - we don't fit the archetypal pattern of what we consider is good or holy, we so often fail to love ourselves. But this is where God's grace excels any of our own judgements because it's not based on legal niceties, or indeed on any human distinctions but on love - and a love that encompasses all creation, including even us.

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