

GOSPEL

MARK 7:31-37

Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. Their admiration was unbounded. 'He has done all things well,' they said 'he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This Sunday's Gospel passage refers to the episode of the miraculous healing by Jesus of a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment. They brought to him a deaf and dumb man, beseeching Him to lay a hand upon him. Instead, He performed two different gestures upon him: first of all He took the man aside, far from the crowd. On this occasion, as on others, Jesus always acts with discretion. He does not want to impress people; He is not seeking popularity or success, but wishes only to do good to people. With this attitude, He teaches us that *good is to be done without clamour*, without ostentation, without "blowing one's trumpet". It should be done quietly.

When they had drawn aside, Jesus put his fingers in the deaf man's ears and touched his tongue with saliva. This gesture refers to the Incarnation. The Son of God is a man inserted into human reality: he became man; therefore he can understand another man's distressing condition and intervene with a gesture which concerned his own humanity. At the same time, Jesus wanted to make it understood that the miracle occurred

because of his union with the Father: for this reason, he looked up to heaven. He then sighed and said the decisive word: "*Ephphatha*", which means "Be opened". And immediately the man was healed: his ears were opened, his tongue was released. For him the healing was an "opening" to others and to the world.

This Gospel narrative emphasizes the need for *a twofold healing*. First and foremost the healing from illness and from physical suffering, in order to restore bodily health; even though this aim is not completely achievable on the earthly plane, despite the many efforts of science and medicine. But there is a second, perhaps more difficult healing, and it is healing from fear. Healing from the fear that impels us to marginalize the sick, to marginalize the suffering, the disabled. And there are many ways to marginalize, even by showing pseudo compassion or by ignoring the problem; we remain deaf and dumb to the suffering of people marked by illness, anguish and difficulty. Too often the sick and the suffering become a problem, while they should be an occasion to show a society's concern and solidarity with regard to the weakest.

Jesus revealed to us the secret of a miracle that we too can imitate, becoming protagonists of "*Ephphatha*", of that phrase 'be opened' with which He gave speech and hearing back to the deaf and dumb man. It means opening ourselves to the needs of our brothers and sisters who are suffering and in need of help, by shunning selfishness and hardheartedness. It is precisely the heart, that is the deep core of the person, that Jesus came to "open", to free, in order to make us capable of fully living the relationship with God and with others. He became man so that man, rendered internally deaf and mute by sin, may hear the voice of God, the voice of Love that speaks to his heart, and thereby in turn, may learn to speak the language of love, transforming it into gestures of generosity and self-giving.

May Mary, the One who completely "opened" herself to the Lord's love,

enable us to experience each day, in faith, the miracle of "*Ephphatha*", in order to live in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What strikes you as both incredibly human and divine in the persons of Jesus in this healing narrative?
- In what way might Jesus be leading you to be more open to both his grace in your life and the needs of others?
- What do we have to learn about our own relationship with Jesus and the way we engage with others from this Gospel passage?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.