

23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

My name is James. Being completely deaf, I was deprived of so much that others take for granted. I couldn't hear the shouts of children at play, the singing of the birds, the sound of the wind in the trees..... I couldn't hear words of comfort, encouragement, or advice. Few people bother to try to communicate with the deaf. They find it too tedious. I felt terribly isolated.

The fact that I was practically dumb as well added to my sense of deprivation and isolation. I couldn't explain myself. I couldn't express my feelings. Insensitive people laughed at my stammerings.

I had no opportunity to contribute anything to the community. Consequently, I felt useless and in the way. People even hesitated to touch me. To be handicapped is to be different. And when you are different, people are afraid of you. Furthermore, I was led to believe that my handicaps were a punishment from God.

I was full of self pity. I craved for compassion. I was convinced that there wasn't a single person who understood or pitied me. That was until the day I learned about Jesus. Even though he was a Jew and I was a Gentile, that didn't deter me from seeking his help.

What an experience ! The first thing he did was take me aside from the crowd, and gave me his undivided attention. This made me feel that I was important to him. At the same time it saved me from the curiosity of gawkers.

He did not speak to me as it would have been a waste of words. Instead he touched me. He made me feel what I couldn't hear. There was nothing rough or hurried about his touch. It was tender, patient and loving.

He put his fingers into my ears. Then he put his finger into his mouth, took some healing spittle from it, and put it on my tongue. Next he raised his eyes to heaven to show me that it was from God that help was to come. Then with a great sigh he said "Be opened !" And suddenly my ears were opened and my speech became normal. I was cured !

He told me not to broadcast what he had done for me. But I was unable to keep quiet. There was so much bottled up inside me that at first I talked incessantly. I couldn't pass anyone in the street without saying "hello". I couldn't remain silent in the presence of someone in pain if I felt a word

would help. I couldn't bear to see an injustice done without denouncing it.

But soon I realized that I was over-talking. I wasn't listening. In that way I was hurting people. So I made a point of trying to really listen to people, which meant that I had to stop talking. I listened too to the sounds of nature, to music, to laughter and crying....

I discovered some interesting things during those early months after my cure. I discovered that everybody has certain impediments that prevent them from making full use of the gift of speech – shyness, insensitivity, apathy..... And they have impediments that prevent them from hearing well - prejudice, inattention, refusal to listen.....

Why am I telling you all this ? It is to save you from the fate of those who have ears but cannot hear, and tongues but cannot speak. What I discovered from my experience is this: the greatest tragedy is not to be born deaf or dumb, but to have ears and yet fail to hear; and to have tongues and yet fail to speak.

Hearing and speech are great gifts. But without a heart that is able to feel compassion, we will never be able to use them well. It is only with the heart that we can listen rightly, and it is only with the heart that we can speak rightly.

The man who touched my ears and my tongue also touched my heart. It was **that**, above all, that made me new. That was the real miracle.