

23rd Sunday: “Ephatha”, Be opened: A Call to empathetic listening

Jesus heals a deaf mute, echoing Isaiah’s prophecy that God will open the ears of the deaf and unseal them, using the original Aramaic word ‘*Ephatha*’. This means God assures his people through Isaiah that he will save them, transforming the natural world, and leading them to new exodus.

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and *the tongue of the mute sing for joy*". Like many Messianic prophecies, part of Jesus' earthly ministry was to bring a taste of what we will experience in the Millennial Kingdom and onto eternity. Jesus’ healing of the deaf is a sign of his divinity and a *metaphor for spiritual healing*, highlighting the importance of listening and empathy in relationships.

We don’t know what the deaf man thinks of all this, but Jesus shows particular gentleness with him. The man seems to be in a vulnerable state; Jesus doesn't use him as a public object lesson. Instead, Jesus pulls him apart, *perhaps so he won't be overwhelmed when his hearing returns*.

Then, Jesus lets the man know, what is going to happen. *Spit is thought to have healing powers in Jewish and Greek tradition*. By going through the process of touching his ears and tongue, Jesus invites the understanding of the man who can't hear what was going on.

This is very similar to how Jesus heals the blind man in Mk.8. People bring the man to Jesus, but *Jesus leads the man out of the village, spits on his eyes, and heals him*. It's important to remember that we can "bring" our friends to Jesus in prayer, but the work of Jesus is an intimate experience between Himself and the one who needs healing.

We cannot heal others; we need to trust and entrust Christ who is the true healer. *We need to remember that God wants our relationship more than our comfort.* We grow closer to Him when *He pulls us aside* and interacts with us, showing us where He is working and not just relieving our inconvenience or pain and letting us go on our merry way.

Between 1948 and 1993, only 18 cures at Lourdes met the International Medical Committee's strict criteria, deemed "medically inexplicable", which were then confirmed as complete miracles.

Jesus' miracle of healing the deaf points to his desire to heal our spiritual deafness, or reluctance to listen, and break open our inner ears to hear God's call.

Listening requires courage and is essential in relationships, as emphasized by Pope Francis, to break spiritual deafness and harmonize with others. Good listening requires courage, also because it involves entertaining others' ideas, which risks changing one's own mind and perspective.

Today's gospel emphasizes the importance of mutual listening in the synodal Church, likening it to an orchestra where diverse sounds must harmonize under the conductor's guidance. How important it is to listen to each other in relationships as well, taking quality time to listen patiently and attentively to others, rather than interrupting or offering unsolicited opinions.

May the Lord open our ears to be attentive to His word and to those around us, breaking our spiritual deafness. Amen