

Homily: 23rd Sunday Ordinary Time, yr. B, 2021

In 1950, Mother Teresa; now known as St. Teresa of Calcutta; founded the Missionaries of Charity, an order of Religious sisters that seeks to care for the dying and destitute of the world. In her book; In the Heart of the World, Mother Teresa described her spirituality: Seeking the face of GOD in everything and everyone, all the time, and HIS Hand in every happening; this is what it means to be Contemplative in the heart of the world. Seeing and Adoring the Presence of JESUS especially in the lowly appearance of Bread, and in the distressing disguise of the poor.... When JESUS opened the ears of the deaf man by proclaiming Ephphatha, this wasn't just a physical healing story of a deaf man. JESUS desired to open his heart, mind, and spirit to hear HIS Word however it came to him. Coming into our world to undo all the effects of Original sin, JESUS desires to open the heart, mind and spirit of all HIS Disciples. In this narrative, we discover what JESUS wants for all of us. In a very real sense, you could say Mother Teresa tapped into this desire JESUS had and has for HIS Community of Disciples, and founded an Ephphatha Community. A Community of openness of mind, heart and spirit. Ephphatha is to understand who we are and to realize the good we can do, no matter the degree of power we possess or don't possess. Ephphatha can be defined as the spiritual ability to hear the voice of GOD in the midst of the noise

and distractions of our lives and our world that daily surround us; it's the spiritual ability to sense, see and hear GOD'S Presence even in the midst of disappointment, frustration or despair; it's the spiritual ability to sense, see, and hear the possibilities we have for bringing GOD'S Healing Grace into our world. Through-out the Hebrew Scriptures, deafness was a metaphor for the people who refused to be moved by GOD's Word and resisted HIM. Israel had ears, but it didn't always hear what GOD was proclaiming. When Prophets said; all you who are deaf, listen and hear; this was a call to conversion more than anything else. One day, according to the Prophet Isaiah, GOD would come performing miracles, instantaneously and effortlessly, revitalizing the land and the people; one day, a great spiritual revival would occur among GOD'S people. According to the Prophet Isaiah, definite signs of a healed creation; would be eyes being opened and ears being cleared and would signal the Presence of the Promised Messiah. The actions of JESUS in this narrative are admittedly, a bit odd, and we would even have to admit, for our time and culture, gross. Instead of the usual taking by the hand or laying on of hands as in most of the other healing narratives, here, JESUS puts HIS Finger into the man's ears, spits, touches the man's tongue, and groans. I don't know about you, but this is one Gospel I don't want to picture in my mind with all the gory details. Salvia, in many cultures of the time, including

both Greek and Hebrew, was said to have healing properties, and would ward off evil spirits. We definitely don't understand that, but JESUS was simply using an action that would've been familiar to HIS potential Gentile Disciples; who now, JESUS strongly hints, will be included in HIS Mission. Why was the man healed? What was the man empowered to do? According to some scholars, to hear the Word of GOD and proclaim it to others. JESUS delivers the man from his inability to hear or speak the Good News. Gospel and grace are now as available to Gentile as they are to the Jew. CHRIST went out of HIS way into the territory of unbelievers to heal them as HE healed HIS fellow Jews. We also hear JESUS Proclaim: Ephphatha! This is an Aramaic word that remains in the narrative regardless of what language the Gospel is in. We are told it means; be opened! The word can also mean birth. JESUS is calling the deaf man to: open yourself and be born, open yourself to the new life of Discipleship. And the deaf man then speaks plainly! He responded in Faith to the Grace that was offered him. GOD, in and through JESUS, desires to heal, restore and to liberate all peoples and nations. CHRIST continues to go out of HIS way to enter the unbelieving parts of our hearts to offer the same spiritual healing HE offered the deaf mute. And I underline spiritual healing. It's obvious, the physical ability to hear is not necessary for an encounter or relationship with GOD; nor is the physical ability to

speaking necessary to proclaim the word of GOD. What IS Necessary? An openness of mind, heart and spirit to the Grace of GOD within, and the willingness to respond wholeheartedly. In the Reading from the Letter of James; openness to GOD'S Grace and the willingness to hear HIS Voice leads to an openness to others, especially to the poor. James insists that all be given the same welcome, and within the Christian Community there's no partiality. Why? Because GOD HIMSELF shows no partiality. GOD'S compassion, love and forgiveness are extended to all. They were exceedingly astonished and said; HE has done all things well! Where have we heard that before? Maybe in the Book of Genesis? GOD looked at everything HE had made, and found it very good. So, the people said of JESUS what Genesis said of GOD. In one well-known painting, JESUS is reaching out to touch and heal a blind man and HIS disciples are looking over HIS shoulder watching. They were watching, but through the experience of HIS RESURRECTION and ASCENSION, and through the Empowerment brought about by the Coming of the HOLY SPIRIT on Pentecost, they would also be called upon to be healers in the Name of CHRIST. All of us are called to continue that same ministry. We all do it differently, but we all engage in it. In the words of Fr. Michael Hayes: Each one of us is a living miracle. Each one of us is GOD'S original. Each of us are one of a kind. Each one of us are necessary. Each one of us

belong. It all boils down to this: GOD'S plan for the fulfillment of HIS creation and the coming of HIS kingdom, includes each one of us. GOD needs each one of us, and we need each other. May our Faith, Hope and Love be always strengthened and renewed, that we might also follow the path of JESUS and do all things well!