

St Pius-St Anthony 23rd Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2nd

Something to celebrate here! A man couldn't hear or speak and Jesus heals him, *opening two new worlds* to him! Can we even imagine what sounds from the world this man will now hear **for the first time** (he may have a **whole new year** of firsts-first time hearing birds chirping, children romping on a playground, the first overnight thunderstorm heard, etc) We take so much for granted, but to hear the true 'hum' of a hummingbird, the 'buzz' of bee or even the squeal of a mosquito closing in on our necks, what fine joys in this world we take for granted. I remember a girl (partially deaf) in college sharing with our writing class, how excited she was when she little, having just left her audiologist's office to receive an adjustment on her hearing aid, and she heard for the first time the sound of 'fizzing coke in a glass'! Small joys maybe, but if you have never heard them, it is a whole additional world opened up to you. Yet, with this man who also was not speaking, now he can suddenly talk and share with others how much he is hearing for the first time! Yet, isn't that what is funny (paradoxical) about this encounter? This man can't hear or speak (he was brought to Jesus by friends-of course, he hasn't heard Jesus-maybe seen Jesus around-but he can't ask Jesus to heal- he had to have others make request-which I have to take a moment to emphasize the importance of others in the spiritual life, we have to prayer partners, spiritual friends, mission buddies like this man who had friends to bring him to Jesus and pray for him. But the reading says he is a man, so let's say he is 18-20 years old, and when the average life expectancy at Jesus' time in history was 35-40 years, that is half of his life that he has never heard a word or spoken a word, and Jesus heals him. Awesome, but then Jesus commands him, 'Oh by the way, welcome to the world of spoken/heard words **but** don't say anything to anyone about me healing you!' **What does that mean?** Why does Jesus silence so many of his healed patients? A lot can be said about it, yet simply enough for now, please remember that Jesus' book is still being written at this time. He is not through. So don't go spreading personal encounter stories **YET**. The time will come (after death-resurrection) when the whole Jesus is seen & heard & known and then tell the world-Shout it from housetops. But at this early time, Jesus knows they don't fully understand him-any premature talk will only mislead or misunderstand who He is-(Watch as we get a proof positive example of this next weekend when we hear that Peter one second calls Jesus 'Messiah', and then goes on to presume everything wrong about Jesus by tempting him to avoid the cross. If even someone like Peter as close

to Jesus, would be telling people wrong ideas about him, then surely the rest of us would. Jesus doesn't want disciples going off telling or giving wrong impressions about Jesus to others. Then Jesus would appear a circus sideshow instead of a true savior. They would only know the miracle part, not the most important part of his cross and death. Yes, Jesus came to heal, yet that is only part of it, Most importantly, Jesus came to suffer for us, and die for us. Might that, all be missed if we only heard about the healing spectacles? So, Jesus means, 'Don't say anything, FOR NOW.' He doesn't want people to have the wrong idea about Him.

But back to the miracle itself! What a personal, personal savior Jesus is? He is not a cardboard cut-out, not stiff robotic assembly line savior-next-healed, next-healed, next-healed. No, notice how really personal and close to people Jesus is; every person is special to Jesus. Jesus takes the time to step aside with this guy away from the crowd- Why? Well, imagine this man he hears nothing now, and suddenly his ears are opened and we know how noisy crowds-streets-markets can be. Being blown away, this guy might say 'It's too much Jesus-take me back-deafen me again Jesus' So, Jesus pulls him aside to a **quieter place** so that he may gently be ushered into our world of sound. But also notice how important **touch, (especially as a sense- the man has no sound or voice so his other senses would be overcompensating)** and Jesus personalizes this encounter with touch! Jesus could snap his fingers, or wave a wand; but the reading says, Jesus led the man aside which meant taking his hand/or placing His arm around the shoulder to lead him to a quieter place. then getting even more close, Jesus puts fingers into the man's ears, spits and groans again, touching his tongue (That all, establishes pretty close physical contact- Jesus builds a means of conduction; creates a channel of communication to the man-vibration as Jesus is the true whisperer of our souls. Always, Jesus wants to break through to us on whatever level he can, to reach us and the man has new worlds opened to him- he can hear and speak, and I love that the first voice he hears is God-Jesus Himself, 'Ephphatha' (Aramiac word meaning 'be opened')

Jesus is the perfect communicator: He speak to us on whatever level we need, He finds a common language for each of us. Here, He is speaking on the language-level of vibration/touch/movement to lead the man out of deafness and muteness. It means a lot to me that Jesus is reaching out to the man on his level first. He can't speak or hear; so Jesus reaches in, touching him. That is a level all its own. By Jesus touching the man, pushing into his ears and touching his tongue, the man is going to **feel** Jesus-think of

the vibration & movement the man will feel as Jesus (That is why Jesus spits- it is more a deep throat clearing-like a shaking cough and Jesus 'groans' his word. He doesn't just in small tones say 'be opened'. No, he GROANS 'ephphatha'. The importance of vibration and communicating/messaging through the skin, was taught to me when I was a kid. Some of my parents' friends we would go to visit a lot had a daughter Jenny was born deaf. She amazed me because she seemed especially attuned to touch and motion. For example, I remember one time when we came into the house around Christmas, and Jenny was lying on the ground kind of under the tree and she had a little music box playing Christmas carols. She was enjoying it so much. We had puzzled looks on our faces like 'Has a miracle occurred, Can Jenny hear now?' and Mom let us in on it, saying, 'No, she presses the box hard to her ear-to her head and she feels the vibration of the music and with the blinking lights on the Christmas tree synchronized; she loves it.' It was quite THE experience for her. So, with Jesus in this healing story, we have one more example of our good shepherd Jesus breaking through all barriers to speak and use whatever language can reach us to let us know he cares and loves us. As a good (personal) shepherd, He seeks us out. He makes contact with us. He provides for us what we need-even the belonging, connection and comfort of touching us. and we can be assured that when He said 'Be opened' it was meant as a word of promise to us also. That with Him, whole new worlds-new levels of communication would be open available to us!