

Dear Brothers and Sisters



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When I was a child a deaf boy came to stay with my family for a weekend, his name was Daniel. Knowing he was deaf, I began to speak to him in a loud voice, carefully enunciating my words, pronouncing very slowly. He looked at me and said: "I'm deaf, not stupid." My father thought that was hilarious.

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Of course, to look at him you'd never know he was deaf. His condition was not immediately evident, and this was to his advantage; in fact, he and his deaf friends, who I met that weekend, overcame their condition by compensating for it in such expert ways that it almost disappeared.

This is normal, people learn to compensate, to adapt, to redress the condition that would otherwise impair them.

A friend of mine was born without a hand. Growing up, he became so adept at doing things with one hand, that people were unaware of his condition. He could tie his shoes laces, type as fast as anyone, play guitar, play ball, all with one hand. No one knew. Someone was once in his parish, talking to the Pastor about the young man with one hand. The Pastor, who knew the young man very well, did not know who they were talking about. "You look at him next time you see him, you'll see he only has one hand." Lo and behold, the next time the Pastor saw him he realized for the first time that this young man, who he had known for at least a year, had only one hand. The way he moved, the way he walked, the way he stood, hiding his stump in his pocket, you would never know, until you really looked, that there was something amiss.

The man in today's Gospel had no such luck. He was deaf and had a speech impediment; but even if he had managed to hide his infirmity all his life, the game was finally up. He was brought to Jesus, who then put his finger into the man's ears and, can you believe it, spitting, touched his tongue. The man could no longer hide. Can you imagine someone sticking their fingers in your ears, and on top of that if you are deaf? To have someone spit on their fingers and then open your mouth to touch your tongue!

Very unpleasant, but necessary. The man must have been mortified, but also relieved. Finally, someone had exposed his weakness, not to humiliate him, but to help him. Unless our weaknesses are brought to light, made evident, they can never really be cured. They can be hidden, or adapted to, or compensated for, but that's not the same as being healed.

All of us can be mute. That is why the Prayer of the Church, the Divine Office, begins every morning with the antiphon: 'Lord, open my lips – and my mouth will proclaim your praise.' The real impediment of speech is the incapacity to Bendicire – to speak well, of God. The inability to say 'God you are great, you have done wonderful things in me, in my life, in my family.' Not to be able to do this is a terrible impediment.

All of us can be deaf. The first psalm in the daily prayer of the church begins: 'Today, listen to the voice of the Lord; do not grow stubborn as your fathers did in the wilderness.' The real deafness is that which impedes one from listening to God. We listen to many things: the radio, the TV, the iPod, the opinions of others, even our own thoughts...but to listen to God? Only those who have been cured of their deafness are able to do this.

Will we acknowledge our deafness? (Mea culpa, I am stubborn; I listen to many things, but I am often deaf to the voice of God). Will we accept to be impaired of speech? (Mea culpa, I use my tongue to speak evil, to gossip, to curse, to blaspheme, to complain; but I speak well -Bendicire- very infrequently). If we acknowledge this, we can discover that we are not humiliated, but healed. Jesus wants to put his fingers in our ears and his spittle on our tongue? Don't be surprised if he does so at Mass today.

Fr. Sean