

Mark wrote the earliest of the four Gospels, the one that brings us closest to the humanity of Jesus. Unlike the other Gospel-writers he sometimes tells us what Jesus was thinking or feeling.

A man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech was brought to Jesus by his friends. In an oral culture where people were largely illiterate, not to be able to hear or speak properly was an enormous liability. Those who could neither hear nor speak were invisible; they could not be communicated with, in any meaningful way.

The friends of the deaf man in today's gospel can be an inspiration to us. They *brought their friend to Jesus* to see if he could be cured. Their speaking to Jesus on this man's behalf led to his being able to speak again, coming to have a voice of his own. Even when he was voiceless, his friends heard the longings of his heart, and their listening led on to him being able to hear for himself. Their care for him led them to speak on his behalf. If they had not first listened to him, they would not have taken the initiative to speak up for him.

The healing process Jesus uses is almost like a ritual and, in fact, it was. Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ear and puts spittle on his tongue. (Spittle was believed to have healing properties and today we know this is actually

true.) At the same time Jesus looked heavenward – to his Father – and said, in Aramaic, "Be opened".

Immediately the man was healed; the people around were astounded. They cried out almost in chorus: "He has done all things well; he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak." They were echoing the lovely words from Isaiah in the First Reading: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy." The future promised by the prophet has now arrived. Jesus, merciful and compassionate.

The problem is that for a long time we see our religion as something personal between ourselves and God.

For example, the rich man in the Gospel told Jesus he had kept all the commandments. Do I need to do more? he asked. Yes, he was told, ***let go of everything you have, share it with the poor and needy, and then come and follow me.***

And when it comes to people it is very difficult for us not to make distinctions. It is natural and human to make distinctions. In the 2nd Reading, James calls on church members not to show favour on the basis of wealth or social class.

How do we treat different kinds of people in our society? If we are honest, we know that there have been times

when we have treated people in exactly the way James describes; *making distinctions between classes of people.*

What are our attitudes to wealth and poverty? Which people do we regard as really rich and enriching? What kind of wealth are we in pursuit of? Are we totally free of discrimination in areas of sex, race, religion, class, occupation...?

Our answers to these questions will tell us how much we have really heard the Word of God...and practiced.

They will also tell us how we communicate to others by our words and our actions and attitudes.

**Do we realize that, sometimes we are deaf? Does it occur to us that, as individuals and as church, we do not yet fully understand the message of Jesus?**

**Can we too, in our human weakness, become channels of the healing power of God?**

**What signs do we perform to show that the Kingdom of God is coming?**

Let us ask Jesus to touch our eyes and our tongue that we may see him more clearly and speak of him more clearly.