

**GOSPEL**

Mk. 31-37

In illo tēpore: Exiens Jesus de finibus Tyri, venit per Sidónem ad mare Galilaeae inter médios fines Decapóleos. Et addúcant ei surdum et mutum, et deprecántur eum, ut impónat illi manum. Et apprehéndens eum de turba seórsum, misit dígitos suos in aurículas ejus: et éxspuens, tétigit linguam ejus: et suspíciens in caelum, ingémuit, et ait illi: Ephpheta, quod est, adperire. Et statim apértae sunt aures ejus, et solútum est vínculum linguae ejus, et loquebátur recte. Et praecépít illis, ne cui dícerent. Quanto autem eis praecipiébat, tanto magís plus praedicábant: et eo ámplius admirábantur, dicéntes: Bene ómnia fecit: et surdos fecit audíre, et mutos loqui.

At that time, Jesus going out to the coasts of Tyre, came by Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring to Him one deaf and dumb, and they besought Him that He would lay His hand upon him. And taking him from the multitude apart, He put His fingers into his ears, and spitting, He touched his tongue and looking up to heaven, He groaned and said to him: Ephpheta, that is, Be thou opened: and immediately his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right. And He charged them that they should tell no man: but the more He charged them so much the more a great deal did they publish it and so much the more did they wonder, saying: He hath done all things well He hath made both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

As we look closely at this Gospel, perhaps it's a moving and touching miracle, but the message also lies much deeper. Mark pointed out right at the beginning that Jesus was in the Gentile territory and so the man Jesus healed was not even Jewish. If there are **clubs** and **associations** to separate us in our time, the **separations** and **divisions** is much more so in Jesus time, especially between a **Jew** and a **Gentile**, between a **rabbi** and a person with **physical defects**. We don't know much about the deaf man of today's Gospel whom Jesus cured. We do know that his infirmity had placed him in a position of **isolation**. Not only was he cut off from the sounds of the world and the voices of his fellow men, but also, under Roman law, a deaf man was classified as **mentally incompetent**. You can ask any person with any sort of disabilities; they have to live with **discrimination**, **isolation**, **embarrassments** and **judgments** on a daily basis. Here in this Gospel, Jesus came along and try to break down all these **walls** and **barriers**. It is remarkable to consider how often

the Gospel writers seem to go out of their way to tell us about how Jesus reach out to them; and just like the miracle today even touching them, physically touching them; those who are **sick and ill, the outcast.**

Within our community we have to learn to **put aside our differences, tear down our barriers, and demolish all that divides us, beginning with our judgments.** Then, and only then, can we claim we are Christians. We must accept other persons in their weaknesses, as Christ has accepted us in ours. "**Survival of the fittest**" is not valid Christian doctrine. Not only do we need to tear down these prejudices but following the example of Jesus, we must also learn **to reach out...**to get out of our **comfort zone**, and even bring the healing touch of the Risen Christ.

The medical community has been telling us about the all importance therapeutic value of **touching.** For example, monitoring equipment can measure the effects of the healing touch of a nurse on a patient. The heart beats of intensive care patients often can be stabilized when a caring nurse holds a patient's hand. The effects are actually measurable. A few years ago, in some **orphanages in South America**, many of the young children were dying mysteriously. It seemed like an epidemic. It was discovered, however, that because of staff shortages in these orphanages, there was no time for the attendants to pick up the babies. The children were fed, and changed when necessary, but no one ever **held** them, no one ever **cuddled** them, no one ever **communicated love** to them in this motherly way. And so the babies died. Dr. Rene Spitz, who studied this phenomenon, concluded that the babies were dying for **lack of touch, for lack of the love** that is communicated through touching. There has been other medical research that offers convincing evidence of the therapeutic value of the healing touch.

One psychologist has written, "**Our need to be touched is as basic as our need for food. Without it we get a kind of malnutrition of the spirit.**" We find this emphasis everywhere in today's psychological literature. **Henri Nouwen**, author of many spiritual books, has written about his experiences in South America, working among the poor. He talks about the children who come and stand beside him, not looking for a handout, but hoping to be **hugged, to be touched, to be loved.** They want that more than anything else, he says. And most of us are familiar with **Leo Buscaglia**, the psychologist, who has built a whole career as a best-selling author on hugging.

We can use the simple gesture of **shaking hands** as more than a perfunctory gesture of politeness. We can use it as an opportunity for the healing touch to communicate **warmth and friendship and understanding and compassion.** We can also use it as a sign of our own vulnerability -- our openness to receive the other on his or her own turf, our willingness to listen and to be sensitive to wherever it is he or she is coming from.

In our scientific and electronic world, we do lose this sense of touch. It is sad to see how many families there are in which little or no hugging takes place. Children, wives, and husbands need this kind of affirmation. We all need it, whether we realize it or not. Simply saying through the hug, "**I really care about you, I really love you**" is often the most beautiful and helpful thing we can do for one another. Mother Theresa says the greatest disease of our time is **loneliness**, the feeling of **unloved and uncared for.** I hope we can step out of our comfort zone and offer a **handshake, a hug** or even a **simple smile.**

We can do a lot of good through those simple gestures. Turn those occasions of judging and separation and divisions into opportunities for healing. We have that healing power, and so use it.