

## **September 09, 2015 Deafness Homily:**

Sometime in the year 1802 a German composer of classical music, wrote an anguished letter of sorrow and regret to each of his two brothers, Johann and Carl. At the time, the composer was hard of hearing, and, in the course of time, would suffer from complete deafness. In his letter, he shared the following thoughts: "For six years I have been hopelessly afflicted, made worse by senseless physicians; from year to year deceived with hopes of improvement. Firmly compelled to face the prospect of a lasting malady I must live almost alone like one who is banished."

Around the same time, he expressed his frustration and utter helplessness: "But what humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing" He came close to despair. The composer: Ludwig Von Beethoven. When the Master conducted his great symphony, the ninth, he could not hear the music. Nor could he hear the thunderous applause at the conclusion of the performance. Sadly, he was completely deaf.

In today's gospel (Mk.7:31-37), a deaf man takes center stage. One can only imagine his world of silence and isolation. Our compassionate Lord Jesus, moved by the sufferings of the deaf man, looks up to heaven, a gesture of prayer, and emits a groan (a deep sound expressing pain and distress). It is the only place in the gospel where Jesus is said to groan. What is of greatest concern to Our Lord is that the disabled man is deprived of hearing the Word of God, a fate worse than death. By healing the unnamed deaf person, Jesus showed that the kingdom of God had truly come into the midst of his people and that the prophecy of Isaiah had truly been fulfilled in his person: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the death be cleared"(Is. 35:5).

Let it be noted that hearing has a deep spiritual significance. From the biblical perspective, listening to the Word of God must be a priority. God must first open our hearts so that we can listen to his words, words of everlasting life. We recall the words of Our Lord: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it" (Lk.11:28). Elsewhere, Jesus says to his disciples: "Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear"(Mk.8:18).

Each of us should ask: am I hard of hearing when Jesus speaks to me? Do I cover my ears when a teaching of Jesus makes me uncomfortable? In Saint Augustine's unforgettable "*Confessions*", he writes compellingly of his conversion in the following words: "You called, you shouted and you broke through my deafness". In his book, "*Be Not Afraid*", the longtime friend and advocate of the disabled, Jean Vanier, a French Canadian, offers the follow insight based on Christ's compassion for the wounded members of society. "Jesus the healer comes when we are conscious that we need a healer, when we become conscious of our own egoism, all the anarchy of desire, all the fears, all the cowardice and weakness, all the need for human security that incites us to possess. It is only when we become conscious of our weakness and our fears that we can begin to grow in union with the Spirit".

Lord, break through our deafness. Open our ears! Help us to be attentive and obedient to your words of truth. And if we know anyone who is "deaf" to your Word, may your Divine Son come to him and say, "Be opened".

Amen.