

One thing I enjoy very much is going for long walks. Of course in Jesus' day walking was the main way of getting around. There were no motor cars or aeroplanes and only the very rich could ride on a donkey or horse.

The walk Jesus takes in today's Gospel is quite incredible. We read in the opening sentence of the Gospel: 'Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region.' This is a very long walk – perhaps 100kms, and a very roundabout walk – much longer than it needed to be – and most of it is through pagan territory.

Why did Jesus take this long walk in pagan territory with his disciples? He needed to spend time with them, away from the crowds in Israel who were coming to him, so he could teach them. They knew something about him but had much more to learn.

But his reputation had already spread and even the pagans knew about him, and they brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and asked him to lay his hand on him. To give him a blessing. They did not expect a cure, they simply wanted a blessing.

Moved with pity Jesus responds by taking the man away by himself. Now that's exactly what he is doing with his disciples – taking them away by themselves – so there is a connection here. What he is going to do for the deaf man is what he is going to do for his disciples who are also deaf though they don't realise it. Jesus has already told them that he will soon be arrested and crucified, and on the third day rise from the dead but they are not hearing him. They are deaf to what he is saying.

As we read this story, we recognise that oftentimes we too have the same problem. We too are often spiritually deaf. We cannot hear what the Lord is saying to us. So, we ask the Lord in this Mass to touch our ears also and open them, to remove the prejudices and preconceived ideas that prevent us from hearing God's word to us. May the Lord do for us what he did for St Augustine: **You called and shouted and burst my deafness.**

First and foremost, we need to learn to listen to our sisters and brothers. If we are deaf to the cries of our neighbour, we will not hear the voice of God who speaks to us through them. We need to be reflective people, people of prayer who ponder in our hearts the events of our lives and discern God's voice in them.

May the Lord open our ears that our admiration may also be unbounded. Together let us praise the Lord who does all things well, who makes the dumb hear and he deaf speak.

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