

We live in an age of constant noise. The noise of the world comes to us in many forms: through the news media online and on TV with the 24-hour cable news bombardment; through social media and streaming platforms and the continuous scrolling and stimulation from screens where peoples' opinions are constantly being thrown at us and where we lose ourselves in endless binge-watching. Noise comes to us from our phones and all the texting, e-mails, phone calls, and Facetimes.

Then there's the noise that comes from the active and busy pace of our daily lives. We're constantly moving and going from one place to another and we're constantly doing something and at times we can't seem to stop and take a breath. This is in addition to all of the internal noise of our souls that consists of our thoughts, fears, worries, anxieties, and wounds. Sometimes our mind is constantly going and we can't seem to just stop and rest for a moment. The temptations we experience also contribute to the internal noise of our lives—everyday we're enticed to choose evil in some way, shape, or form.

Regardless of its source, there tends to be *so much noise* in our life in 2021. There can be *so much* noise in our daily life that we're unable

to hear the voice of God and then listen to Him—the voice of the One Who created us and redeemed us—the voice of the One Who loves us beyond our comprehension.

In today's Gospel, our Lord Jesus heals a deaf and mute man by breaking through the noise of the crowd and the internal noise of this man's suffering. This particular healing by Jesus is defined by physical gestures that demonstrate the saving power of his *human* nature.

Throughout His public ministry, our Lord Jesus often used physical signs and gestures to accompany his healing: a touch, the laying on of hands, water, washing, mud, and even his own spit. All of these gestures were intended by the Lord to demonstrate the inherent goodness of physical matter, creation, and most especially *human* nature!

As human beings, our nature consists of a unity between body and soul, and so our *physical bodies are inherently good!* Lastly, all of the physical signs and gestures of Jesus' miracles throughout His public ministry laid the foundations for the Seven Sacraments, the outward signs by which Christ, *physically* acting through His ordained ministers, gives us His sanctifying and healing grace.

Now let's return to the miraculous healing of the deaf and mute man in today's Gospel from Mark. St. Mark gives us an important detail in the beginning about this miracle: we're told that once the people brought this deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus, our Savior then, "***took him off by himself away from the crowd.***" This is significant because even though this man was deaf, our Lord Jesus wanted to take him away from all of the noise of the crowd in order to heal him through a direct, personal, and physical encounter. I mean, can you imagine being deaf and being surrounded by a crowd of people yelling or talking about you and you have no idea what's going on and you can't understand what they're saying? Can you imagine the internal noise and chaos of uncertainty, fear, confusion, and anxiety that this man must've experienced while being in the midst of the crowd?

Once our Lord takes this deaf man away from the chaos and noise of the crowd, He heals him in a most peculiar manner. St. Mark tells us that Jesus, "put his finger into the man's ears and, ***spitting, touched his tongue;***" [the CDC would not be happy with Jesus]. Then Jesus, "looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "***Ephphatha!***"— that

is [in Aramaic], “Be opened!” —And immediately the man’s ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly.”

While physical distancing has its merits in the context of a pandemic, “physical distancing” is *not in God’s lexicon*. *In Jesus*, God seeks to be close to us, *most especially* when we suffer.

Brothers and sisters, just as our Lord Jesus lovingly took this man away by himself from all of the noise of the crowd in order to heal him, so our Savior *also* desires to take *us* away from all of the noise in our daily life in order to heal us, strengthen us, sanctify us, and comfort us. The equivalent of our Lord “taking us away from the crowd” in order to be one on one with us is prayer! Prayer is basically Jesus leading us away from all of the noise of the world, in order to love us and be united with us. Prayer is *always God’s initiative*, not ours! Our first step in prayer is always a *response* to God’s invitation to be with Him. Prayer is *God’s desire* to be with us and love us in the context of a fruitful dialogue. And yet, given our noisy lives, it can be really hard to hear the voice of the Lord calling us to be with Him in prayer.

Moreover, the voice of the Lord comes to us in a multitude of ways, not just in prayer, but also most certainly through His Catholic Church and Her Magisterial teachings, the Seven Sacraments, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as well as Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, which jointly contains the Word of God. And how can we forget silence, which is the preferred language of God, and something that we probably don't get enough of in our daily life. God speaks to us in silence and it is in prayerful and contemplative silence that we encounter Him. God can also speak to us through other human beings, music, and certain events and experiences. And so we have to guard against spiritual deafness and muteness, which prevents us from hearing and listening to the voice of God and then responding to Him in love. We have to guard against the inability to pray.

St. Padre Pio said that "prayer is the oxygen of the soul." Therefore, if we're not praying, we're dying. And St. Paul exhorts us to "pray without ceasing," meaning that we must strive to always be attentive to the voice of the Lord in our lives, seeking to live in an unceasing union with Him, since He is always present to us.

Right now, in the midst of all of the noise we may be experiencing, the Lord is calling out to us in order to heal any spiritual deafness and muteness in our life so that we can be with Him in prayer and the sacraments and live in unceasing union with Him in our daily life, always striving to act in accordance with His loving will.

As we prepare to encounter Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, the same Jesus Who took the deaf man away from the noise of the crowd and healed him, let us pray: “Lord Jesus, heal any spiritual deafness and muteness in my life. Help me to hear your voice in my daily life and listen to You so that I may do Your will and love You with my whole heart and soul. Give me the grace to reduce the noise in my life so that I may hear You and allow myself to be loved by You. Amen.”