

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, B
September 6, 2009
8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m.

1. The story is told that at a celebrity party, Stevie Wonder met golf champ, Tiger Woods. Wonder mentioned that he too, was an excellent golfer. Tiger was a bit skeptical that the blind man could play golf well, but he was too polite to say anything. "When I tee off, the singer explained, "I have a guy call out to me from the green. My sharp sense of hearing lets me aim." Tiger was impressed, and Stevie suggested that they play a round. When Tiger agreed, Stevie asks, "How about if we play for \$100,000?" Tiger insisted he wouldn't play for money, but Stevie argued until Tiger finally relented and said, "So, when do you want to play?" Stevie laughed and replied, "I'm available almost any NIGHT."
2. On the golf course, at night, a blind man may have an advantage, but a deaf man unable to speak never had the upper hand
 - Today's Gospel tells us of a man in such a situation, unable to hear and speak
 - in the Middle East, deafness was a far worse malady than blindness
 - first, in an oral culture, faith, learning, and wisdom was passed on by speech from one generation to the next
 - second, the important Jewish prayer – the Shema – begins with the words - "Hear O Israel!" (Deut 6) could not be heard or recited
 - third, Jesus' teaching was completely verbal – how could he understand the Kingdom of God if he couldn't hear? How would he ever experience the comforting words of God's presence?
3. On top of all this, Deafness, put this person into a position of needing friends for assistance
 - it implied a spiritual problem and it implied punishment from God
4. Famous author Helen Keller, who was born deaf, mute and blind once wrote, "I have found deafness to be a much greater handicap than blindness... For deafness means the loss of the most vital stimulus – the sound of the voice that brings language, sets thought astir and keeps us in intellectual company"
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 - In our Gospel today, Jesus heals a man this man who is deaf and unable to speak
 - by putting his fingers into the man's ears and, by taking his spittle, touching his tongue
 - these were places in the man's body where there is no capacity; no life
 - in the Middle Eastern culture, people would touch the person who suffered often in the very spot that needed the healing
 - it may sound a bit strange to us but just remember when you were a kid and hurt your finger or bumped your leg
 - your mom would say, "let me kiss you where it hurts" and somehow, somehow,

it seemed to feel better

6. And the fact that he used spittle may also seem so strange to us
 - but think about what Garrison Keillor once said about mother's spit
 - "it can put stray hairs in place, wash dirty spots off faces and heal any hurt."
 - for Jesus, spittle was a medicine of his day
 - and in our modern times, I couldn't help but think how detectives get a DNA sample – by swabbing someone's tongue
 - maybe Jesus was saying to this man, "I want my DNA to be your DNA"
 - I want you to know I am in you; with you; my spirit is your spirit; my heart is your heart.

7. The healing Isaiah speaks of in the first reading describes the end times when all the blind will see, the deaf hear and the mute speak
 - when Jesus heals the man in the gospel, he anticipates this end time
 - and the book of James reminds us not to be blind and deaf when it comes to the needs of the poor

8. One of the great blessings about being Catholic is the fact that our worship is so sensual
 - think about it – when you walked in the Worship Space today, you placed your hand in holy water and were reminded of your baptism in Christ
 - before the Gospel is proclaimed we made the sign of the cross on our foreheads, our lips and our hearts – to ask God to fill our minds, our words and our hearts with his Word
 - we bow before receiving communion, we stand each time we pray;
 - we extend our hands to our neighbors in peace
 - we hear the Word of God proclaimed and beautiful music raises our hearts with inspiration and joy
 - we anoint the sick with healing touch and oil; we anoint babies on their hearts to strengthen them and on their heads to remind them of their priestly call and confirmation candidates called to be disciples
 - we take and eat the body and blood of Christ and are nourished
 - we use sweet smelling incense and our smell is awakened to the presence of God
 - so many wonderful ways that God uses our senses to communicate to us the intimate, abiding presence of God's love in our gathering, in our persons, in our lives

9. Today, Jesus invites us to present to Him whatever part of our lives is hurting; whatever needs to be made whole
 - our disappointments and fears, our pains and our hurts, our blindness and our inability to speak; our hesitations and our compulsions, our distressing situations and our weaknesses
 - and he calls out to us, "Ephetha" – be open, I will touch you where it hurts, I will comfort you with my peace. I will fill you with my life; and my love; I will dwell within you always. [OPEN MY EYES]