

## **The Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time September 5, 2021**

One Sunday, John's pastor, asked him if he would like to serve as a greeter at church. He explained that he would be welcoming people as they arrived and then help them find a pew. It sounded simple enough, and since John went to Mass every Sunday anyway, he was happy to help. Father thanked him and told him that there would be a training meeting that Tuesday night.

So, he went to the meeting not expecting much. The pastor started it with a question that would change John's life forever. After a short prayer, Father asked everyone to share on the question, "What is Jesus doing in my life?"

The question took John off guard. He had been to several parish meetings during his life, but he had never been asked such a personal question. And, he was embarrassed to admit that he didn't know how to answer it. So, he sat back and listened to what everyone else had to say hoping that he would come up with something.

When it was his turn to share, he cleared his throat and said, "Well, I guess what Jesus is doing in my life is asking me to greet people at church." Everyone laughed and said that it was a good answer. Still, John was unhappy with it. He thought he should have had a better one.

The question stuck with John. He knew it was too important a question to leave unanswered. In the days following the meeting, he thought about it frequently. Then, he decided that he would end every day asking himself, "What is Jesus doing in my life today?"

That one, simple question changed John's spiritual life in significant ways. He became more attuned to God's presence with him throughout the day. When feelings or thoughts would arise, he would ask himself whether they brought him closer to God or drew him away from God. He also became more aware of the people around him, what their needs were, and what they had to teach him. It soon dawned on John that this one simple question - "What is Jesus doing in my life?" - was one of the most important questions of all.

How would you answer that question? What is Jesus doing in your life? Is it a question that you have ever asked yourself? Today's gospel teaches us how we can begin to answer that question for ourselves.

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When the people bring a deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus, what is the first thing He does? St Mark tells us that “He took him off by himself away from the crowd.” This short sentence teaches us an important truth about the spiritual life. If we are going to get in touch with Jesus and grow more aware of His presence and action in our lives, we have to get away from the crowd. We are going to have to take time alone to settle ourselves down and quiet our minds.

The crowd represents all the noise that’s around us that drowns out the desires of our hearts. They also represent the people around us, all the expectations that they have of us, and our need to impress and please them. We have to get away from that crowd, turn off the social media and all the other distractions, and sit quietly in the presence of Jesus. Only then can we grow in awareness of how He is acting in our lives.

After Jesus takes the man away from the crowd, He does something curious. St Mark tells us that He put His fingers in the man’s ears and put some of his spit on his tongue. This is symbolic of the sacraments, the way that Jesus uses ordinary things like water in baptism and bread in the Eucharist, to make His saving power present and active in us.

This means that, if we are to grow in our awareness of what Jesus is doing in our lives, we need to be receiving the sacraments frequently - especially the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion. When we go to confession, we take an honest inventory of all the choices we have made that have moved us away from God and His love. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an encounter with God’s mercy that opens our eyes to all the ways His love supports us. And Holy Communion is the sacrament which makes Jesus truly present to us and where we welcome Him into our bodies. When we are going to confession frequently and receiving Eucharist as often as possible, our sense of Jesus’ presence in our life will grow in remarkable ways.

Then, St Mark tells us that first the man’s ears were opened and after that his speech impediment was healed. This tells us that it is more important to listen than to speak. If we are going to answer the question, “What is Jesus doing in my life?”, then we need to be listening for His voice. We do that by spending time reading the Bible and asking ourselves, “What does this passage mean to me? How does it speak to my life?”

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So, what is Jesus doing in your life? If everyone were to get up today and answer that question for themselves, I'm sure we would hear some very powerful answers. There would also be those who wouldn't know how to answer it. And that's OK.

I ask you to think about that question this week. Step away from the crowd, let Jesus touch you, and listen to His voice so that, when you come here next Sunday, you will be able to answer that question. Then, share that answer with someone. You will be amazed at how it will change your life.