



Isn't it true that when we love someone we want to know all about them? We want to know who they are. Maybe this is especially true about a young man and woman who fall in love, but it is also true for all kinds of love, not just romantic love.

So it is and so it should be concerning our relationship with Jesus. Our love for Him should make us want to know more deeply who He is; and by discovering more deeply who He is, we find that we love Him even more and want to know Him even more. Because of this, we are filled with joy.

This little Gospel reading that we have today tells us much about Jesus, about who He is.

The reading starts out: "Again Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee into the district of the Decapolis." "Decapolis" means "10 cities". This was pagan territory. This sentence about Jesus' movements tells that Jesus moved from Jewish territory into pagan territory. Pagan territory was filled with non-believers, believers in all the false gods.

We see here Jesus' great love and concern for all people. He was reaching beyond the Jewish people, seeking the vast multitudes of humanity who are lost, who are steeped in sin and error. What does this tell us about Jesus? It tells us that His love is so immense that there is no one beyond His grasp. There is no one outside of His desire to save.

There is a beautiful story about St Therese, the Little Flower, that illustrates this. When St. Therese was a 12-year-old girl, she read in the paper about a terrible murderer there in France. He was unrepentant, hardened, and condemned to die for his crimes. He refused to see a priest. St. Therese was moved to intercede for him. She prayed and offered sacrifice for him, for his repentance.

As the murderer faced the noose from which he was to be hanged for his crimes, a priest lifted a crucifix and the murderer kissed it. This was a sign to St. Therese that he had repented. Jesus went after him, moving his heart to sorrow for his crimes and he received God's mercy.

Jesus is the all-merciful one who goes after everyone, even the worst sinner.

The reading continues: "And people brought to Him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged Him to lay His hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd." I find this to be an incredible passage. See how respectful Jesus is of

the man's dignity! See what it said: "He took him off by himself." Look what He is doing here. He didn't want this man's healing to become a spectacle, a source of embarrassment for the man. This tells us of Jesus' gentleness and compassion, His concern for even something like this man not becoming embarrassed by this healing. That is the way Jesus is and He has concerns for us in the same way.

The reading continues: "He put His fingers into the man's ears and spitting, touched his tongue. Then He looked up to heaven and groaned and said to him, 'Ephphatha'". Now Jesus could have just healed the man by willing it. He didn't have to use spit or say any words. But He does this as a sign of His entrance into our world. He uses very human things to bring forth His divine power.

He does this all the time. Jesus uses bread and wine and the priest's words to bring us Himself in the Eucharist. He uses simply olive oil to bring healing in the Sacrament of the Sick. And in the confessional, he uses the simple words of the priest to bring forgiveness of sins. He enters into our world. He uses material things to bring His divine power. This tells us of Jesus' great humility. This is God using small things. He stoops down to us, not begrudgingly, but humbly to help us, to love us, to give us life.

My friends, I suggest that you take this little Gospel reading sometime this week and pray with it. Allow Jesus to show you Himself and use other stories from the Gospels too to get to know Jesus more deeply. In coming to know Him more, you will be moved by Him to love Him more and by loving Him more to give yourself more completely to Him.

**Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua, South Bend  
23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time 2009**