

All three readings today speak of God as the centre of all reality and as the centre of our personal lives. "Here is your God!", exclaims the prophet Isaiah in the first reading. In their own way, the Letter of James and the Gospel passage say the very same thing. They want to lead us to God, to set us on the right road in life. Love of neighbour, stressed in the Letter of James, which is primarily a commitment to justice, is the touchstone for faith and love of God. James calls it "the royal law", echoing the words which Jesus used so often: the reign of God, God's kingship.

In the Gospel, Jesus heals a man born deaf and mute. This miraculous healing has a wider application. There is not only a physical deafness which largely cuts people off from social life; there is also a "hardness of hearing" where God is concerned, something particularly common in our own age. Put simply, we are no longer able to hear God - there are too many different frequencies filling our ears. And so we end up losing a decisive capacity for perception. We risk losing our inner senses. This weakening of our capacity for perception can quite seriously curtail the dimensions of our relationship with reality in general. The horizon of our life is disturbingly shortened.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus put his fingers in the ears of the deaf-mute, touched the sick man's tongue with spittle and said "*Ephphatha*" - "Be opened". The text maintains the original Aramaic word, and takes us to the very moment of the healing. What happened then, though, does not belong to the distant past: Jesus continues to do the same thing again, even today. At our Baptism he touched each of us and said "*Ephphatha*" - "Be opened" - enabling us to hear God's voice and to be able to talk to him. Baptism opens up a path before us, making us part of the community of those who are able to hear and speak; it brings us into fellowship with Jesus himself, who alone has seen God and is thus able to speak of him: through faith, Jesus wants to share with us his seeing God, his hearing the Father and his conversation with him. The path upon which we set out at Baptism is meant to be a process of increasing development, by which we grow in the life of communion with God, and develop a different way of looking at the world around us. Let us move forward with the true eyesight God gives us - the eye of faith!