

## 23<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Toon Suffys SJ

In our church we regularly have people who sign up for a faith course or for groups who want to talk about faith and faith experience. They are often Dutch, but also ex-pats who want to know more about Roman Catholic faith. They have learned about the faith here and want to know more. They open themselves to God who wants to speak to them. To them Jesus spoke: Effata: Be opened. In recent weeks we have heard and seen a lot about people who want to flee their country and who want to go to other countries in search of a safer life. There are people who meet them, take them in, help them to integrate into the country where these refugees eventually end up. These helpers have listened to the compassion in their hearts. To them Jesus spoke: Effata: Be opened.

We, who have been Christians for years, sit here in church and hear the gospel in which Jesus speaks: Effata, Be opened. What can that mean for us?

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah said: Tell all those who are distraught: "Take courage, do not be afraid; here is your God, who brings vengeance, divine retribution. Do we open ourselves to divine retribution? Do we want to see God take revenge for all the injustice that brings pain and suffering to so many people in the world? And what do we expect when God takes vengeance? Have we heard what the vengeance of God will be?

This is the vengeance of our God: Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be opened. Then the lame will dance like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing. And water will well up in the desert, and rivers in the parched land. The scorched land will become a lake, the thirsty ground a fountain of water.

Do we open our hearts to this? Can we believe that it is happening in our world? Can we see that God is taking revenge by very human means.

Thanks to glasses and contact lenses, many visually impaired people can participate in society without hindrance. Thanks to hearing aids, the hard of hearing can once again talk to others.

Humanity seeks tools to include people in society again and again.

We have done this physically for the hard of hearing and the visually impaired and we are developing further in the medical field to make life possible for people with disabilities. The events of the last century now shift our focus from personal disability to more social exclusion. Do we open ourselves to the vengeance of God for those millions who become victims of political and economic power struggles. Do we hear the Effata of Jesus when we see on TV those images of victims of natural disasters like the earthquake in Haiti?

Yes, we are not deaf and dumb. We want to do something. But above all, we feel powerless when we see the scale of the problem. What can I, a small citizen in a small country, do to help the millions who are suffering? We can remain in our powerlessness. And thus ultimately perish.

But if many small people make a small sign of solidarity, then great forces are set in motion that will complete God's vengeance: refugees will be taken in, war will end and peace will reach people and set them free.

That is our Christian faith! Are we open to it? For Jesus says to us: Effata! Be opened and believe the Good News.