

# realpeople

the gospel in everyday language



## In today's readings:

Courage! Do not be afraid. Isaiah 35:4-7  
Against hypocrisy. James 2:1-5  
Jesus heals the man who is deaf and mute. Mark 7:31-37

## Next week:

Challenging words from Jesus  
Isaiah 50:5-9; James 2:14-18;  
Mark 8:27-35

## In a nutshell

'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unsealed...' According to Jewish belief, miracles like these were to be signs of the Messiah's presence. Thus Jesus' healing of the deaf and dumb man becomes associated with the messianic age. Jesus is the Christ, God's chosen one, come to heal and free us.



## Miracle of the heart

*Faith and Light*, an international network of Christian communities which support people with disabilities, was born in 1968 from a French family: Gerard and Camille and their two sons, Loic and Thaddee. Both sons had profound disabilities. Neither could walk or talk. Gerard and Camille decided to take their sons to Lourdes.

At first they tried to join the diocesan pilgrimage, but were told it would be impossible to cater for their sons. So the family set off independently. At Lourdes they experienced further rejection. The hotel refused them access to the dining room. At the Grotto people said things like: 'Children like that should be kept at home.'

Gerard and Camille returned to their village deeply hurt by their experience and told their story to Jean Vanier and Marie-Helene Mathieu. From their sharing came a germ of an idea: Why not organise a special pilgrimage for people like Loic and Thaddee, their parents and friends?!

And so it was that preparations for the *Faith and Light* pilgrimage began. People were invited to organise themselves into groups of 15, 20, 30 people. They met regularly to get to know each other and pray together. In Easter 1971, twelve thousand pilgrims set out for Lourdes. It was a pilgrimage beyond imagination. The whole crowd burst into song and prayer, in only one word, for so many could not speak. That word? Alleluia! For three days the town of Lourdes was transformed like never before.

It was indeed a miracle, a miracle of the heart. Parents discovered their child to be a source of peace and hope. People wounded in their intelligence realised they were the cause of the joy of this great crowd. Young people who had come to help discovered a new sense of mission.

And after Lourdes? The little communities continued to meet and grow and multiply. And so the *Faith and Light* movement was born and continues to this day, having a presence in some 75 countries including Australia.

## Healing presence

Being a healing presence can be as simple as just 'being there'. I have many childhood memories of talking to Mum while she ironed. Mum would do the ironing in the afternoons which meant she was always there in the living room when we kids came home from school. If you wanted to talk to her about something, you knew she was there for you - physically in one spot - to listen and to chat about the day. (Kelly)



## Healing hands

Gerry has sustained a permanent physical injury. I told him I was amazed by his positive attitude, a great sign amidst debates about euthanasia.

While he agreed with the benefits of a positive attitude, he said we must not judge people calling out for release from their pain by asking for euthanasia. Rather, we should look to the people around them. What support were they receiving? Did the people who were suffering feel valued? Or did they feel burdensome to those close to them? 'While our choices are ultimately individual, the responsibility is shared by the community,' he said to me. 'I am indeed sustained by the hands of Jesus. The care and reassurance I receive from my family are tangible touches of the Body of Christ.'

## Think...Talk

What weakness in yourself do you try to hide? What might happen if you allowed this weakness to be touched by God's healing love?



**RealPeople** offers faith reflections from the saints and prophets of everyday life.

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