



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 8th 2024**

Theme: "He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

Gathering Prayer

All: O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption, look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters, that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 7:31-37

³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. ³² And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. ³³ And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; ³⁴ and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

Gospel Focus

Jesus' healing work often involves opening what is closed. Here it is ears and tongue—ears that are closed to the sound of music and laughter and conversation, tongue that closes its owner off from communicating clearly. Jesus opens these, enabling the deaf man to hear and to speak, entering more fully into the dialogues that surround him. Elsewhere it is eyes; in curing blindness, Jesus opens eyes that was once closed. Jesus opens many other closures, too. Sometimes it is spiritual blindness, opening the eyes of our hearts through his teaching and his preaching. Doors can be closed, and Jesus opens them, offering a way where there was none before. Hearts can be closed, unable to change or grow or connect, and Jesus can open them, willing us into life that is deeper and fuller and more vibrant and more joyful.

Gospel Reflection

Even without a hearing impairment, hearing someone speaking to us in the midst of a noisy crowd can be a challenge. In today's gospel, people bring to Jesus a man with a

hearing and speech impediment and beg him to lay his hand on him. The first thing Jesus does is to take the man away from the crowd. When the man's hearing is restored, the first voice he will hear is that of Jesus inviting him to greater openness. Jesus draws close to the man and then touches him. Using the same techniques as other healers, he touches the man's ears and tongue, and pronounces a word that Mark preserves in Aramaic. "Ephphatha"-that is, "Be opened!" We follow the pattern today with our sacraments, using not only words but also physical touch, and the tangible signs of oil, water, bread, and wine, which have power to transform. Jesus uses spittle on the man's tongue. In antiquity, spitting was thought to ward off evil spirits. However, Jesus' power is not magical. Rather, he looks up into heaven to acknowledge the divine origin of his power and directs the onlookers to God as well. Through Jesus' power, the man's ears are opened and his speech becomes clear. What the man says Mark does not tell us.

The crowd, meanwhile, becomes even more vociferous, proclaiming with astonishment the marvels Jesus is doing. Jesus orders them to be silent, but they do not heed him. It is a bit ironic that as Jesus enables a man with garbled speech to speak plainly; at the same time he enjoins silence on the babbling crowd. The crowd is focused on the flashy signs of the inbreaking of God's reign, such as Isaiah foretells in the first reading for this Sunday. However, the crowd misses the deeper meaning of what the signs signify. Jesus is not a showy miracle worker. Unless one becomes open to a deeper encounter with Jesus as the crucified and risen One, and to being transformed into his image, one cannot fully proclaim the mystery of the good news he brings.

The physical ability to hear is not necessary for such an encounter with Christ; nor is the physical ability to speak necessary to proclaim the word of God. It is openness of mind, heart, and spirit to the breath of God within and without, and the willingness to respond wholehearted that are essentially. In the second reading, it is clear that openness to God also results in our openness to other, especially those who are poor. James insists that all should be given the same welcome. There should be no partiality (*prosopelempsia*, literally, "lifting up the face"), because when we display favoritism, it is generally toward the rich. When God, however, "show no partiality" (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11), it concerns God's graciousness that extends to all-Jew and Greek alike. When it comes to those who are poor, all through the Scriptures God is shown to be like a mother who loves all her children equally but shows partiality to the one who is most needy.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Isaiah 35:4-7

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Responsorial Psalm—Ps 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

Response: Praise the Lord, my soul!

The God of Jacob keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets captives free. **(R)**

The Lord gives sight to the blind; the Lord raises up those who were bowed down. The Lord loves the just; the Lord protects strangers. **(R)**

The fatherless and the widow the Lord sustains, but the way of the wicked he thwarts. The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations. **(R)**

Second Reading — James 2:1-5

¹ My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

Catechism of The Catholic Church

1151. – *Signs taken up by Christ.* In his preaching the Lord Jesus often makes use of the signs of creation to make known the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. (Cf. *Lk* 8:10.) He performs healings and illustrates his preaching with physical signs or symbolic gestures. (Cf. *Jn* 9:6; *Mk* 7:33 ff.; 8:22 ff.) He gives new meaning to the deeds and signs of the Old Covenant, above all to the Exodus and the Passover, (Cf. *Lk* 9:31; 22:7-20.) for he himself is the meaning of all these signs.

1504. – Often Jesus asks the sick to believe. (Cf. *Mk* 5:34, 36; 9:23.) He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands, (Cf. *Mk* 7:32-36; 8:22-25) mud and washing. (Cf. *Jn* 9:6-7) The sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all." (*Lk* 6:19; cf. *Mk* 1:41; 3:10; 6:56) And so in the sacraments Christ continues to "touch" us in order to heal us.

Sharing and Discussion

1. What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Why, as mentioned in the epistle of James(2nd reading), does it seem that the materially poor are often so rich in faith and the rich so poor?
2. Jesus' healing work often involves opening what is closed. "Is there a part of your life where you feel stuck or distant from God, and how might you invite Him into that area?"
3. Which needs to be more open to God right now; your eyes, your ears, or your heart?

Closing Prayer

All: Faithful God, you sent your Son into the world to heal the sick and teach the sinful. Hear our prayers that we might listen to the living word of Jesus and allow our hearts to be transformed by his saving power. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.