

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. Matt 4:23

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom and cured every disease among the people.

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 7:31-37; L128B

Again Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis.

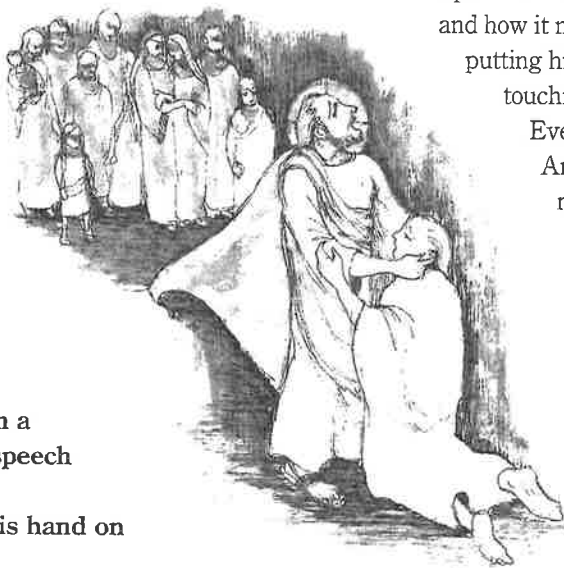
And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him.

He took him off by himself away from the crowd.

He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!"—that is, "Be opened!"—

And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly.

He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."



Reflecting on the Gospel

Have you ever seen odd behavior from someone you knew, or rather, thought you knew?! People, even close friends, can surprise us sometimes with their actions. Today we hear about a frankly odd miracle story that occurs only in the Gospel of Mark. Matthew and Luke, who used Mark as a source, apparently thought they had other miracle stories they could tell that would make the same point without repeating this one. And the Gospel of John tells us only seven "signs" that Jesus performed, and this is not one.

Upon reading this unique Markan story, I often imagine the episode and how it might be portrayed in artwork. Can we imagine Jesus putting his finger in another person's ear? Or Jesus spitting and touching the person's tongue, groaning in a foreign language? Even so, that's precisely what the gospel tells us happened. And the Aramaic term preserved in the Greek New Testament, *Ephphatha* is in the imperative singular form and clearly means, "Be opened."

Perhaps we are not surprised to hear that in the early centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection many thought of him as a magician. Even in the Acts of the Apostles, when the disciples heal in Jesus' name, Simon Magus offers them money so he can do the same. On some early Christian sarcophagi (burial chambers) Jesus is at times portrayed with a magic wand. We might excuse some of the crowds for thinking that Jesus had magic power, as it seems some later Christians did too!

But Jesus was not a magician. His mighty deeds were ushering in the kingdom of God. His actions were being done "by the finger of God" rather than by a magic wand. Jesus was more than a wonder-worker, though he definitely worked wonders.

The mighty deeds of Jesus were about restoration, healing, and wholeness. Those on the margins, those outcast, and those who were relegated to a kind of second-class citizenship on account of physical ailments were healed, made whole, and thereby restored to the community.

And as so often happens in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus orders those he heals not to tell anyone about it, but to no avail. Something so astonishing could not be kept under wraps. Almost like children, the more he told them not to, the more they proclaimed it. That is true evangelical zeal!

Living the Paschal Mystery

We might not witness such dramatic deeds as the deaf hearing, or the mute speaking, but we witness God's activity in the world on a daily basis. We can participate in the activity of Jesus by bringing in the excluded, reaching out to those on the margins, and empathizing with those who have less. Each time we go outside of ourselves to deal with the needs of another person, we are acting as an "other Christ" or an *alter Christus*. By virtue of our baptism that is our vocation, to be another Christ on earth, ministering to those in need wherever and whenever we find them. Figuratively, and even literally, we can help to give voice to the voiceless, and assist those who cannot hear to hear. The voiceless might not be a mute, but instead the marginalized without access to the microphone of public debate. Those who cannot hear might not be the deaf, but those

who are figuratively deaf to the injustice in our world. As another Christ, it is our duty as baptized Christians to enact God’s kingdom on earth. Today we are given a model for doing that. When we do so, our behavior might be thought of as odd, but it is nevertheless our calling and our vocation.

**Focusing the Gospel**

*Mark 7:31-37*

*Ephphatha*—“Be opened!” The exhortation *Ephphatha* is not only addressed to the man born deaf but also to his disciples both then and now who fail to hear and see and speak the presence of God in their very midst.

The Aramaic term *Ephphatha* literally means “be opened”: Jesus “opens” not only the man’s ears but also a life of community, shutting the door on exclusion from the people of God. Jesus’ curing of the deaf man with spittle is an act of re-creation. God has entered human history in the extraordinary ministry of Jesus.

Mark includes several interesting details in his story of Jesus’ curing of the deaf man. When presented with the deaf man, Jesus stops, makes time for the man, and takes him away from the crowd to a quiet, safe place. Jesus then “put his finger into the man’s ears / and, spitting, touched his tongue.” Jesus cures the man with only a fleeting word and, by his touch, he enters into the man’s struggle and pain—in doing so, Jesus brings hope and healing to his life.

Throughout Mark’s gospel, Jesus insists that his healings be kept quiet in order that his full identity be revealed and understood only in the light of his cross and resurrection. But this man, like so many others, cannot keep the Good News to himself. He is compelled to proclaim it despite an injunction from Jesus himself.

**Focusing the First Reading**

*Isa 35:4-7a*

Isaiah’s vision of a Messiah who would come with hope and healing is realized in the Jesus of the gospels: the deaf hear, the blind see, the silent are given voice, and the lame “leap like a stag.”

**Focusing the Responsorial Psalm**

*Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10 (1b)*

The Lord as healer of the sick, restorer of the broken, and protector of the fallen is praised by the psalmist in the second half of Psalm 146. True wisdom, the psalmist proclaims, is to trust in the God of creation, the Lord who is the source of all that is good.

**Focusing the Second Reading**

*Jas 2:1-5*

Today’s homily from the writer of James admonishes the community not to show favoritism to those who impress with their wealth or celebrity. The gospel calls us to see all men and women as equal sons and daughters of God—with a clear preference given to “those who are poor in the world” whom God has made “rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.”

**PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS**

In what ways can we be “deaf” to the love of God?

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When have you been especially blessed by another person’s gift of simple listening?

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What attitudes, situations, troubles, etc., in your life would you ask Jesus to “release” you from?

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Who are among the most difficult to welcome into our lives? Who are those among us most often forgotten or ignored, if not out-and-out rejected? How can we create a place of welcome to them within our parish community?

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