

## Weekend Readings & Reflections

### September 5, 2021 – Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Reflection:** *The incident in today's Gospel is recorded only by Mark. The key line is what the crowd says at the end: "He has done all things well." In the Greek, this echoes the creation story, recalling that God saw all the things He had done and declared them good (see [Genesis 1:31](#)). Mark also deliberately evokes Isaiah's promise, which we hear in today's First Reading, that God will make the deaf hear and the mute speak. He even uses a Greek word to describe the man's condition (mogilalon = "speech impediment") that's only found in one other place in the Bible—in the Greek translation of today's Isaiah passage, where the prophet describes the "dumb" singing. The crowd recognizes that Jesus is doing what the prophet had foretold. But Mark wants us to see something far greater—that, to use the words from today's First Reading: "Here is your God." Notice how personal and physical the drama is in the Gospel. Our focus is drawn to a hand, a finger, ears, a tongue, spitting. In Jesus, Mark shows us, God has truly come in the flesh. What He has done is to make all things new, a new creation (see [Revelation 21:1-5](#)). As Isaiah promised, He has made the living waters of Baptism flow in the desert of the world. He has set captives free from their sins, as we sing in today's Psalm. He has come that rich and poor might dine together in the Eucharistic feast, as James tells us in today's Epistle. He has done for each of us what He did for that deaf mute. He has opened our ears to hear the Word of God and loosed our tongues that we might sing praises to Him. Let us then give thanks to our glorious Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. Let us say with Isaiah, "Here is our God, He comes to save us." Let us be rich in faith, that we might inherit the kingdom promised to those who love Him.*



### OPENING PRAYER

**Leader:** Welcome to our study for the Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Let us open in prayer:

**All:** Lord, you invite all who are burdened to come to you. Allow your healing Hand to heal me. Touch my soul with your compassion for others; touch my heart with your courage and infinite love for all; touch my mind with your wisdom, and may my mouth always proclaim your praise. Teach me to reach out to you in all my needs, and help me to lead others to you by my example. Most loving heart of Jesus, bring me health in body and spirit that I may serve you with all my strength. Touch gently this life which you have created, now and forever.

**Leader:** Some people bring a sick man to Jesus in today's healing story. Jesus receives the sick man on behalf of the people who bring him. Notice the great faith of those who brought the man to Jesus: they did not ask Jesus to heal him specifically, but trusted him to the Great Physician. Who do you need to bring to Jesus for healing? Do you need healing yourself? Do you not trust Jesus to heal the wounds of the world, but rather attempt to fix everything yourself? As we open the Scriptures together today, let's take a few minutes to reflect with Sean Dalton on Christ's divine power to heal us.

#### Digging Deeper

##### Going Away with Jesus

The most challenging part of allowing Christ to heal us is actually allowing it to happen. It usually does not happen overnight and can be painful, just like recovering from surgery can be incredibly painful. Jesus took the man away from the others in order to heal him. Christ takes us away from what makes us comfortable, away from our past, away from the crutch of bad habits, so that He may purge us from our sins and give us true freedom in His love. As painful as it may be to reject our bad habits, do not be afraid to follow Christ where He asks you to go. You will

## FIRST READING ~ Isaiah 35:4-7a ~

Thus says the LORD: Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared; then will the lame leap like a stag, then the tongue of the mute will sing. Streams will burst forth in the desert, and rivers in the steppe. The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water.

The Prophet Isaiah is with the community of Israel as it endures exile in the foreign land of Babylon. No temple. No liturgy. God is experienced as 'silent'. In their difficulty Isaiah reveals the hope of God rescuing his people through a promised Messiah - anointed one - who will come to save you.

- Have you experienced the 'silence' of God?
- Isaiah teaches God seeks complete restoration and wholeness: imagine blind people now seeing. Deaf hearing. Crippled leaping. Silent singing. Desert now flowing. Do you consider yourself as an agent of God's hope for a broken world?

## SECOND READING ~ James 2:1-5 ~

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here, please," while you say to the poor one, "Stand there, " or "Sit at my feet, " have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?

James demands concrete behaviour and action. It is not enough to know and say we care for the poor. We must show it. James highlights the christian assembly. As we gather for worship we reveal our truth to the world: equality as brothers and sisters in Jesus. Gold rings or shabby clothing is irrelevant.

- Have you 'made distinctions' amongst friends, extended family? Do you 'change' when you are in the company of different people? Are you in relationship and friendship with the 'poor'? would they experience you as kind but still instructing them to 'stand there' or 'sit at your feet'?
- An early document called 'Statutes of the Apostles' charged the priests with making a seat available for a poor person arriving at Church, but he did not have to go out of his way for a rich person. Why? Can you see how our liturgical gathering is to mirror the world we seek to create?



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."

**Mark uses the same greek word from Isaiah to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah who helps the mute speak - healing his speech impediment. Today theology and geography connect. Jesus intentionally travels back to Galilee but by a very long and unusual route stepping into 'gentile - unclean' territory. Not only would the Pharisees and those spying on him now not follow him, but like a bulldozer, he shows by his actions he will not live by the 'clean' 'unclean' categories that label people as distant from God.**

- **Have your words of concern for the poor been transformed into practical action? What boundaries could you 'step over' to welcome in those who feel distant from God?**

**Healing passages are powerful opportunities for healing in our own lives. Consider the 'deaf man'. He was lucky to have some friends. Normally illness or disease was considered the result of sin, the presence of an evil spirit. The person was shunned, isolated from family, considered 'unclean'. In addition, this man could not hear or speak. A picture of the most painful experience of human life and our broken humanity.**

- **As you reflect on this passage do you identify with the deaf and mute man or the carers who 'brought him to Jesus'? Why?**

**Jesus took the man 'off by himself, away from the crowd'. Saving him from embarrassment, and tenderly healing the parts of his wounded body.**

- **What parts of your life need to 'be opened' so that you may be whole, reunited and accepted with the community. What would it mean for you to be led 'away from the crowds for healing'. How could you take up this offer this week? What would it take for you to hear God? Sing God's praises? Dance for joy?**

## MEDITATION

How do you expect the Lord Jesus to treat you when you ask for his help? Do you approach with fear and doubt, or with faith and confidence? Jesus never turned anyone aside who approached him with sincerity and trust. And whatever Jesus did, he did well. He demonstrated both the beauty and goodness of God in his actions.

When Jesus approaches a man who is both deaf and a stutterer, Jesus shows his considerateness for this man's predicament. Jesus takes him aside privately, no doubt to remove him from embarrassment with a noisy crowd of gawkers (onlookers). Jesus then puts his fingers into the deaf man's ears and he touches the man's tongue with his own spittle to physically identify with this man's infirmity and to awaken faith in him. With a word of command, the poor man's ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

What is the significance of Jesus putting his fingers into the man's ears? Gregory the Great, a church father from the 6th century, comments on this miracle: "The Spirit is called the finger of God. When the Lord puts his fingers into the ears of the deaf mute, he was opening the soul of man to faith through the gifts of the Holy Spirit."

The people's response to this miracle testifies to Jesus' great care for others: *He has done all things well*. No problem or burden was too much for Jesus' careful consideration. The Lord treats each of us with kindness and compassion and he calls us to treat one another in like manner. The Holy Spirit who dwells within us enables us to love as Jesus loves.

- **Do you show kindness and compassion to your neighbors and do you treat them with considerateness as Jesus did?**
- **How do you expect the Lord Jesus to treat you when you ask for his help? Do you approach with fear and doubt, or with faith and confidence?**

## CLOSING PRAYER

**Leader:** In closing, let us now pray ...

**ALL:** Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and inflame my heart with love and compassion. Make me attentive to the needs of others that I may show them kindness and care. Make me an instrument of your mercy and peace that I may help others find healing and wholeness in you. Amen.

**Leader:** (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

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[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

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