

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



Mark 7:31-37

31 Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. **32** And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. **33** He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. **34** Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.' **35** And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. **36** And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. **37** Their admiration was unbounded. 'He has done all things well,' they said. 'He makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

Other readings: Isaiah 35:4-7 Psalm 145 (146) James 2:1-5

This particular miracle story is only found in the Gospel of Mark. It happens in pagan territory, and is a sign of the openness of Jesus to healing all people. In this healing miracle Jesus uses different techniques to cure the man, including placing spittle on the man's tongue. Such techniques are known to have been used by other healers in ancient times, and it is remarkable that on occasion Jesus uses them too, perhaps to show that all healing is the work of God.

The word 'Ephphatha' is one of the rare instances of Aramaic words of Jesus being recorded by the evangelist. Aramaic was the native language of Jesus, while the gospels record everything in Greek, the international language of the day. The Aramaic word has to be written down in the gospel using Greek letters.

Hearing and speech are restored to the man, but Jesus then commands silence about the miracle. This is a particular feature of the gospel miracle stories and may be explained if we recall that Jesus was particularly concerned not to be made the leader of a popular movement, perhaps even a revolt against Roman rule. The purposes of the coming of Jesus are not involved with the politics of the day but with the true healing of people and societies.

The passage concludes with an allusion to the prophecy of Isaiah in our first reading. The days of the blind seeing, the deaf hearing and the dumb speaking were long desired by the people of former times. God's coming, it was hoped, would transform people's lives and the whole of creation. The miracle story suggests that these days have come. Who then is this man Jesus?

How can I imitate Jesus' openness to people of different race and culture?

What is my attitude to people with disabilities?

Let us pray that we may use all our senses in the service of the gospel.

We pray for those who exercise healing ministries.