

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**

**TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 8, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 35:4-7	The deaf shall hear and the mute will speak.
James 2:1-5	The poor have been chosen to inherit the kingdom.
Mark 7:31-37	Jesus opened the ears of the deaf.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Scriptures carefully in your group beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church community. What does God want the community to hear today?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Isaiah:

Some scholars suggest that this section of the Book of Isaiah does not properly belong here with the writings attributed to the great Isaiah of Jerusalem, as are all the chapters 1-39. Rather, they suggest that chapters 34-35 should be included with the following section, chapters 40-55, which properly belong to a disciple of Isaiah writing from the experience of the Exile in Babylon. The wall that will crumble is not literally the wall of Jerusalem, which has already been breached, but the wall of spiritual obstinacy which has prevented people from relating intimately to God. Then, those who are sick will be healed; those who are blind will see; those who are mute will speak. Jesus has removed the “wall.” There can be no separation now.

James:

The practices of favoring certain persons or groups of persons in the Church have not ended with James’ exhortation not to indulge in “favoritism.” Discrimination continues to plague us just as it does the rest of humanity. Christians do not seem to do much better than others when it comes to eliminating racial, ethnic, class or gender-based acts of discrimination. To be fair, it was the work of Christian activists that led to the emancipation of slaves in this country. Christian activists led the fight in our own times for civil rights for racial minorities. Too often, though, many of us are on the other side of the fight still.

Mark:

Mark may have been confused about his geography, but he was clear about his theology! The journey described here is like going from Bangor to Houlton, Maine, by way of Jackman, into Canada, over the top of Maine, and back into the state at Woodstock, New Brunswick! Jesus knew where he was going with his ministry to the sick. He was fulfilling the prophecies that said that in the days of the Messiah the deaf would come to hear and give glory to God.

Those who cannot hear sometimes have difficulty speaking. Those of us who have not heard the word of God cannot speak the truth with faith about God, about our salvation, about Jesus Christ the Lord. First, we must be able to hear. Habitual sin will gradually make us deaf to the voice of God in our consciences. Deliberate sin will render us entirely senseless, insensitive to the appeal of Jesus Christ.

Jesus takes the man aside for the healing. In the Bible, such a detail usually means that some very special manifestation of God, an epiphany, is about to occur. It is too sacred for the mere mob to be able to witness and to respond.

Touching the ears and putting his own saliva on the man's tongue indicates how intimately Jesus wants to communicate the power in his human body to the body of the person being healed. Although Jesus has the power to heal from a distance, he most often wants to give the human touch to his ministry. We cannot hold ourselves isolated from one another and still engage in the ministries of Jesus Christ. A certain intimacy is necessary for an effective giving of ourselves when we minister to other people. Cloistered nuns and monks keep themselves away from contacts with people in order to be totally given to God. Most of us are not called to that radical lifestyle. We need to be with people rubbing elbows, touching each other's ears and tongues!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the various ways in which the Church participates in the messianic ministry of Jesus by opening ears and granting the gift of speech to people who would otherwise be deaf and unable to speak about the mysteries of salvation. How have your ears been opened by the ministries of the Church? How have you been enabled to speak about the mercies of God?

2. Why do you suppose Jesus wanted to be among Gentiles when he worked this miracle? How does this miracle prepare the way for the work of evangelization? Do you invoke the power that is in you because of your baptism when you prepare to bring Good News to someone else? Do you see Jesus working through your ministry when you proclaim the good news of salvation?

3. What spiritual impediments are we afflicted with these days? Why do we have difficulty hearing that God loves us? What keeps us from speaking out concerning the mercies that we ourselves have received from God? Why is witnessing so very challenging? Some of us cannot keep our mouths shut about anything at all, except about the Christ who is our Savior and our Lord. What gives?

PRAYER

God our Father, you have sent your Son Jesus Christ to open the ears of those who cannot hear, to remove the impediments from the tongues of those who cannot speak. Grant to all who have been healed of these ailments to become healers in return, so that the whole world may soon hear the message of salvation that is in Jesus Christ and proclaim your glory to all the world.

Amen.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Pope Saint John Paul II appealed to the Catholic people of the world to read the Bible in a prayerful way as a source of nurture for their faith and spirituality. Despite what Protestants say about us, the Catholic Church has encouraged Catholic people of our times to read the Bible. I am not prepared to do a study of the times when it was “forbidden” for Catholics to read the Bible, but I do know that in this century it has been positively encouraged. The first Bible I ever owned was one published by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in Washington, D.C., the Douay-Rheims Version. On the title page, it was said that one could gain 300 days indulgences each day if one read the Bible! What can be more Catholic than that?

The Catholic Church has its own way of reading the Bible, however. The Church was the custodian of the Bible long before any other Christian group came along. Even the early Protestants (16th century) read the Bible the same way Catholics did.

In the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy, the word of God is proclaimed according to the seasons of salvation. The Liturgical Year: Easter, preceded by Lent and followed by the Easter Season until Pentecost. The Christmas Season, preceded by Advent and followed until Epiphany. Then, on weekdays, we read from the Cycle of the Saints.

That is the Catholic tradition for proclaiming the word of God in the Scriptures. We proclaim the Bible word in the midst of the prayer assembly. The word is addressed to a community, primarily, not to individuals. It is only inasmuch as we are members of the Church community that we can truly hear the word the same way we do. Those who do not believe do not hear what we hear.

The Bible is not a textbook of religion but a sacred text to be used as the assembly of faith gathers to celebrate God’s love and mercy.

We make no apologies to others who use the Bible differently.

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