

# Scripture Study

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B



## Opening prayer

Isaiah 35:4-7a

(Psalm 146:7-10)

James 2:1-5

Mark 7:31-37

## Overview of the Gospel:

- Jesus has just come from Gentile territory (the Gentile coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon) where he has healed a Canaanite woman's daughter of a demon (Mark 7:24-30).
- In this Sunday's episode—which appears only in Mark—he is in Gentile lands again; the region of the Decapolis, a confederation of 10 cities just east of the Sea of Galilee. Ironically, this confederation was founded in part to discourage Jewish incursions.
- Jesus' manner of healing often takes on a *sacramental* aspect; that is, he incorporates the material into healings done by his Divine power. Similarly, the Sacraments of the Church are not only signs, but signs that effect (actually accomplish) what they signify; for example: the saving power of Baptism through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21).
- Even though Jesus takes pains to conceal his identity (verses 33, 36; also Mark 1:25, 5:43; CCC 439), it is clear that his actions fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah (Luke 4:1-6; Isaiah 35:4-6; Wisdom 10:21; CCC 549).

## Questions:

- In the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading, what message did Isaiah have for believers who might have begun to falter in their hope? What are some of the miraculous signs which will identify the coming of the Kingdom of God in these verses? In what ways were they fulfilled by Jesus?
- In reference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, how do you behave when the opportunity arises to meet someone famous or wealthy? What association do you have with the poor? Of the two, whose company do you prefer? According to Scripture, what advantages do the poor have that the rich lack?
- It seems Jesus goes out of his way to reach this specific individual to heal him (verse 31). What does that tell you about Jesus?
- What do you think is the significance of Jesus looking up to heaven and sighing right before he heals the man (Mark 8:11-13)? Could it be related to verses 33a and 36?
- Why do you think Jesus used the method he did to heal the man? How is the response of these Gentiles (verse 37) like that of the Jews (1:27; 2:12) and the disciples (4:41)? What do you think is Mark's point in emphasizing this?
- Why do you think that Jesus took the man aside to heal him in private? How has Jesus dealt privately with you (rather than treating you as part of a group)?
- In the liturgy (as in the hymn *Veni Creator*), the Holy Spirit is compared to the finger of God (verse 33). What are the effects that the Holy Spirit has on us that are comparable to the effects that Christ had on the man that was healed (CCC 683, 687)? For us to believe, what must God first do for us (CCC 153)?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1504, 1151

## Closing prayer

"Thou who are sevenfold in thy grace,/Finger of God's right hand,/His Promise, teaching little ones/To speak and understand." ~From *Veni Creator*, an ancient hymn in praise of the Holy Spirit

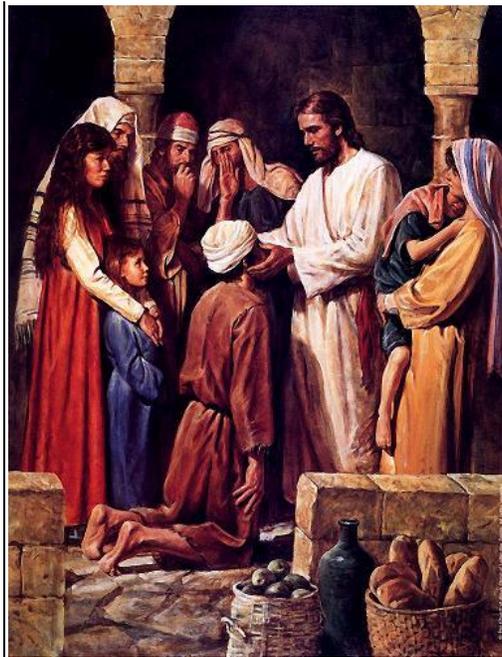
**Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!**

# "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak"

**Scripture:** *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 Decap'olis. 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, "Eph'phatha," 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."*

**Meditation:** How do you expect the Lord Jesus to treat you when you ask for his help? Do you approach him 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. 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 (540-604 AD) 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 kind. 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?

"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."

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