

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – September 6, 2009 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture 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.

Psalm: Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!

The God of Jacob keeps faith forever,

secures justice for the oppressed,

gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets captives free.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The LORD gives sight to the blind;

the LORD raises up those who were bowed
down.

The LORD loves the just;

the LORD protects strangers.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The fatherless and the widow the LORD sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The LORD shall reign forever;

your God, O Zion, through all generations.

Alleluia.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

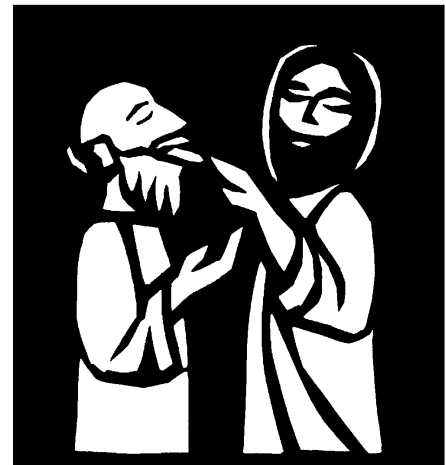
Scripture Reading: James 2:1-5

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?

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37

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."



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the gospel be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Most of us have known what it feels like to have our ears “pop” after descending from a high altitude or recovering from a head cold. What a relief it is, causing us momentarily to marvel at our restored ability to hear. Even the sound of our own voice seems new and wondrous. Imagine the feelings and sensations experienced by the deaf man in today’s gospel. Because of Jesus, he is able to hear for the first time in his life! What a mixture of relief and wonder it must have brought to him. And this is not all that has been healed. The impediment to his speech is instantly taken away as his hearing is given to him. He can now speak in a clear and understandable way.

There is an interesting correlation made in this story between hearing and speech, one that has great significance for those who are to follow Jesus. The invitation to discipleship entails having our own ears “unstopped” so that we can hear the Word of God in our lives. This, in turn, enables us to speak, proclaiming our faith and hope in the One who has healed us. Once able to truly hear, the need and the desire to speak out and testify to our faith is both strong and urgent, a sign that we have indeed answered the call to discipleship.

Jesus was constantly instructing his disciples to listen, to be attentive, to stretch themselves beyond narrow ways of seeing and hearing. This was not easy, especially when they witnessed miracles that brought people their hearing, their sight, their very lives. His admonition to refrain from speaking seems harsh and even unrealistic. Why shouldn’t they be allowed to proclaim his wondrous deed from the rooftops? This gospel may give us a clue. It is essential to listen – to hear *clearly* first – so that one’s speech can be understood. Listening can then become a more effective means in preaching the Good News that Jesus has asked us to share with one another.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Name a person who seems to have an ability to listen clearly to God’s voice. What characterizes that ability to hear? How is it connected to their ability to speak with truthfulness, faithfulness, and clarity?
2. Share ways in which we can more clearly hear the teachings of the Church.
3. A time in my experience of faith when my own ears were “unplugged,” when I heard the message of Jesus differently was... What triggered this?
4. How has being able to hear more clearly given me my voice? How or where do I use it?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations. The following are secondary suggestions:

1. Using Psalm 51:17 – *“Lord, open my lips;/my mouth will proclaim your praise”* – as a mantra. Over the course of the next week, pray it throughout the day as a way to open yourself more fully to the gospel. Next time you gather together as a group, set aside a few minutes to discuss the effect this prayer had in your daily lives.
2. Name someone in your life with whom you have a hard time “opening your ears.” Think about why it’s so difficult to listen to him or her. Decide to be more receptive to what he or she truly has to say about his or her needs, desires, hopes, and fears. Listen for the “sound of God” through them.
3. Give voice to your appreciation for the work others do to bring mercy, kindness, justice and compassion into the world. As a group or as individuals, write a note of affirmation and acknowledgment to them, voicing a particular reason for your admiration of their efforts. This might be addressed to a member of your parish staff. It might be to a school board, city council, charitable board, or other institution created to serve the common good.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Jesus, we put our trust in your healing touch. Unstop our ears and open our hearts to your message of justice, love, and compassion, even when those words challenge us. Remove the impediments from our speech – fear, intimidation, apathy, or doubt. Help us to proclaim our faith loudly and our love for you with gladness. We pray all of this in your holy name. Amen