

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

September 9, 2018

The Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 35:4-7a † James 2:1-5 † Mark 7:31-37



Reflection by: **Sister Elizabeth Michael, O.P.**

Even those who do not doubt Jesus' power to heal every disability must find some things in Mark's version of The Healing of the Deaf Man hard to understand. The story of the double miracle leaves us with at least three questions:

- First of all, since all Jesus needs to do to heal is “lay hands on,” why does he make the miracle so complicated—even a little repugnant? Ignoring the simple request of those who brought the afflicted man to him, Jesus takes the deaf man aside from the crowd, puts his fingers into both ears and “touches the man’s tongue with spittle.” Then he looks to heaven indicating where power comes from and finally gives the command: “Ephphata, be opened.” One explanation for this physical detail might be that Jesus is symbolically modeling for his disciples (i.e. the Church) the level of intimate interaction with the afflicted that shall distinguish his followers and “open” them to divine power.
- The second puzzling question: if the man has never heard a word in any language, how can he speak? Obviously, the first miracle includes the second. But, more significantly, the order of action in the narrative preaches the message embedded in the miracle: “Open! Hear! Speak!” Only one who is really open to God hears the truth, and only one who listens has the right to speak it.
- Finally, why does Jesus order the witnesses to “tell no one” about it? Does he speak “with tongue in cheek,” knowing they will do the opposite? Apparently, the evangelist wants us to think so. I suggest another motivation. Jesus genuinely regrets and resists emphasis on his physical miracles. He prefers that his true disciples have a different focus: To what truth have I been deaf; to what human need am I still turning a deaf ear? Will it take a miracle for me to hear “Open?”