



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

September 6, 2015 Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel reading Mark 7:31-37 *[To be read aloud]*

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."

Brief commentary:

What ancient Israel and Jewish theology thought about God is put on full display in today's reading from Isaiah: God is a god who heals, restores, saves and liberates, vindicates and gives life. Israel is not to fear, because their God is near to them. The psalmist too lists the works of the faithful God: 'feeds the hungry, sets captives free, secures justice for the oppressed, gives sight to the blind, raises those bowed down, protects the stranger, sustains the widow and orphan, blesses the just, thwarts the way of the wicked, reigns'. This theology is an inspired and radical breakthrough from the dominant polytheistic theology of the world of the time, namely that the gods were too preoccupied with their lofty matters to bother to care too much about what goes on in the human world. However, for the god of Israel, it is *particularly what happens in this world*, what is happening to the poor and vulnerable and suffering, and how people treat people, that is the great concern of the Lord. We definitely know how this theology and ethics is at the heart of the Christian movement: the letter of James is a perfect example of how thoroughly active love is of highest importance. In today's Gospel we meet a Jesus who is doing precisely those things that make a difference in people's lives. Jesus is doing God's work. It is no wonder that Jesus' disciples – particularly following his resurrection – understood that what Jesus had done throughout his ministry – heal, restore, save and liberate, vindicate and bring life – is precisely the visible tangible expression of what God was most concerned with. Indeed, at the conclusion of today's passage the "exceedingly astonished" crowd said of Jesus, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." We find today a Jesus who heals, restores hearing and speaking, important abilities for communication. But these represent far more than physical abilities – for it is possible to hear and speak without their corresponding physical abilities. We must understand here something deeper. Indeed, part of the baptismal anointing involves an anointing of our ears that we may hear the Word of God and of our lips that we may proclaim it. Also, in an age of impressive technical communications and social media, are we better listeners and communicators? Can we put our phones down and learn to listen and speak with each other face to face again? We hear with our ears, but we listen with our heart and speak with our actions. Are we truly listening to the Lord, to one another, to the cry of the hungry and the poor? Anointed to do the works of God, in imitation of Jesus Christ, are we doing the things that make a real difference in people's lives? Are we too doing what God does, what Jesus does? The Jesus of today's gospel is an impressive healer, who uses spittle and soil and groans and touch: Are we using our resources wholeheartedly to serve those who need our help?

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- Our theology as Christians comes to us through the Jewish tradition and witness as expressed so authentically and powerfully in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.
- The God of the Bible is one who is deeply concerned for people, particularly the most vulnerable. Jesus reached out to all, particularly those most in need. Jesus did God's work.
- As disciples of Jesus we follow him who did "all things well." We need to truly hear the cry of the poor and speak with our active love. Our mission is to do the work of God in Christ.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- How do I envision God? How does the theology of today's readings resonate with me?
- How has Jesus Christ opened my eyes, my ears, my lips?
- What are the works of God that I have done, am doing, and can do?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 535-42, 1265-74