

By Father Charles Bowes

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

We too are ever in need of God's healing touch

Coming out of deafness, when you've spent your life in silence. Imagine it. You've spent your whole life in pantomime, communicating by gestures since you also have a speech impediment due to the deafness.

You have been excluded from every conversation, from every family party. Even in the synagogue you are not part of worship. You have been unable to tell your girl how much you love her, unable to sing the poems burning in your soul. You are unable even to hear the teaching of the prophet from Galilee, unable to ask him for healing. Others must do it for you, according to Mark chapter 7.

Then Jesus stands before you. He places fingers in your ears and spits, and you are healed!

Do you rejoice? No – not right away at least. Probably you recoil in horror. For the first time you hear the world: the shouting of crowds, the singing of birds, the games of children. You hear the animals and the chirping of crickets. You hear the hammer on the anvil, the falling clatter of tiles, the nailing of wood. You hear this all at once for the first time. It is simply noise, overwhelming noise. You long for silence once more.

This is the real moment of choice: to take a first step into this new world of sound, to begin to distinguish voices, or to curse the One who brought you into this world and retreat once more into the safe corner of silence.

And so you choose and begin to speak plainly.

This gospel reading is proclaimed for our encouragement. The miracle of healing the deaf man, like the promises written in Isaiah chapter 35, bears the message, "Be strong, do not fear, here is your God...God will come and save you." The miracles and promises are signs that God's kingdom is right here with us right now.

Our baptism and our weekly Eucharist proclaim the same hope: God has the power to bring full life and healing for the blind, the deaf, those who are disabled in any way. God has even brought full life to all who have died. God's reign is indeed right here with us right now.

The paradox of the Messianic age, reflecting the power of God to draw life in its fullness from the chaos of death and sin, is the basis of today's readings... and the basis of the hopes of all the baptized.

Well, we might say – that's nice. On Sunday we praise the healing God who comes with divine power.

We sing of the streams bursting forth in the desert, hear of barriers coming down, listen to stories about our savior Jesus who has done everything so well. But during the week, it seems we are on our own: we feel we must rely on our own calculations and actions to get through the day. At Mass we nourish hope for a new kingdom of peace, but meanwhile there is hard work to do and compromising choices to make. As one writer says, "We seem to want all or nothing from God. We will live the life of God's kingdom when God does that which God promised. As soon as the streams burst forth in the desert, we will be able to live the gospel without compromise...then...at that time."

However, folks, Mass is not a bland promise of the future. Eucharist is a taste of God. Nor is our worship the perfect and full presence of God. Like all our tastes, all our arts and writings, it is incomplete. See this celebration as an incomplete but real taste of the healing God. Our "amen" at Holy Communion is our "yes" that God does act now.

We go then to the poor and the blind – and to ourselves in our own poverty and blindness – and give reason to be strong, fearless. Thus we anticipate the final act of healing that we taste here at church.

There is a story told that, owing to the excitement caused by several alleged miracles in the Saint Medard Cemetery in Parish in 1732, Louis XV had this sign placed upon the locked gates: "By order of the King, God is hereby forbidden to work miracles in this place." With similar arrogance, the "I" on the throne of our unsundered hearts forbids God to work his miracles within us.

Let us pray, "Oh good and gracious God, healer of human kind, touch us, heal us, open us, to see, to hear, to speak your Word and to give praise in union with all those whose lives we touch in turn. We ask this through Christ our Lord."

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