

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 35:4-7
Psalm 146:7-10
James 2:1-5
Mark 7:31-37

We need healing from Jesus too.

Spit! Imagine using spit as medicine. For most of us, spit is offensive. We consider spitting a vulgar activity. Yet Jesus used his own spit to remove a speech impediment.

Most unorthodox, we think! For Mediterranean peoples, spitting is a common action to ward off evil in various ethnic traditions. The custom exists even to the present. Recall a scene from the motion picture, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, where the mother and grandmother spit in the direction of the young boys racing through the kitchen. For Jesus, the action of spitting carried much meaning. His use of spittle was more than a warding off of evil. In this context, it connotes tenderness and affection – a reaching out to connect with this suffering person.

A person's spit is a most intimate thing. Jesus' actions are intimate, caring. Putting his fingers into the man's ears, then spitting and touching the man's tongue, bring Jesus into close contact with this man who no doubt had been marginalized because of his ailments. This is more than a simple act of healing. Such simple, almost profane gestures are loaded with significance.

Jesus' actions speak loudly. No one is to be pushed aside, ignored and neglected – no matter the cause. Note, too, that Jesus used what he had at hand.

Simple things: his presence, his hand, his spittle. Sometimes all we have is our presence and our bodily

actions, but that can be a powerful means of grace. Presence means not being a bystander but an active presence wherever we are. Preaching the Gospel and heralding the Kingdom of God can be that simple at times.

This week, we commemorate the fifth anniversary of the destruction of the World Trade Center. We are again reminded of the horror wreaked by hate and jealousy. Such destructive hate is often birthed in those who are pushed aside, those who are considered of little or no importance, those who have been neglected and ignored by societies.

Our government ostensibly is working to ensure that such a dastardly deed does not happen again in our country. However, such prevention is not the sole responsibility of collective groups such as governments. We are aware that a long journey begins with a single step. So, too, the journey toward justice and peace, both in our country and globally – each of us has a responsibility for building the justice and peace that pave the way for the Kingdom of God.

Who do we ignore, consider of little worth, and so push to the margins of our lives? Who in our immediate environs needs our attention? Who needs our presence in order to become visible? Who remains voiceless because we do not speak for them? By whom do we stand? To whom do we offer a hand? Do we socialize only with the so-called "beautiful people"? Do we avoid meeting the eyes of the homeless who

wander our streets? Do we look the other way when we suspect abuse of one kind or another? Do we educate ourselves on the justice issues crying out for our attention? What is the truth about the war in Iraq? Have we listened to all sides of this issue? What of the immigration furor sparked by the September 11 event? Are we refusing asylum to those who drastically need it? What is going on at our borders?

Perhaps it is we who first of all need our ears unstopped and our mouths loosened and our eyes opened as well – that we may see as Jesus sees, hear the cries of the poor around us and become the voices that raise them up. We pray today for the grace to become aware of that Gospel presence that is within the reach of each of us. We pray today for the grace to recognize that Gospel action which requires the ordinary “spit” of our talents.

We need healing from Jesus too.