



TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

September 9, 2018
Year B

Isaiah 35:4-7a
Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10
James 2:1-5
Mark 7:31-37

Assembly

(An unlit candle, a Bible opened to this week's gospel and a hearing aid or an image of a hearing aid rest on a cloth-covered table in the meeting place.)

Beginning Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members are invited to silently focus on God's presence. After a short time of reflection, members alternate reading the following prayer aloud.)

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

I: The God of Jacob keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets captives free.

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

II: 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.

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

I: 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.

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

LISTEN TO THE LORD

(The leader passes out copies of the scriptures¹. The scriptures are read aloud with a pause after each reading. After the gospel is read, the leader invites members to choose a few words from the gospel that touch them.)

*The leader asks these two questions with a pause between them: “**What does this gospel say to you?**”, “**How does this gospel affect you in your life?**” The community silently reflects on these questions. The leader invites members to share their thoughts about the Insights and Reflection Questions for the week in a single group or within smaller groups.)*

Insights

The deaf and mute man described in this week’s gospel must have had a difficult life before he was healed by Jesus. His ability to communicate with the people in his community was severely limited. His life would have been silent and lonely, limited to pointing to something or drawing objects in the dirt to get his ideas across. When Jesus took him aside and uttered the word, Ephphatha! (Be opened), the disabled man was instantly healed; he was now able to hear and speak and be a complete part of the community. He was opened to the world that had previously been closed to him.

¹ Copies of the scriptures for each week are available at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website: www.usccb.org/bible/readings/index.cfm. For weeks that have an especially long gospel, you may use the shorter version identified in the Lectionary.

The ability to hear and to speak allows humans to connect and communicate with other people and to understand their surroundings. Sharing feelings and exchanging ideas can help us to learn and to grow while increasing our understanding of ourselves and other people. Communication can help us be open to learning new things, to teaching others, and to being involved members of our communities.

When Jesus opened the disabled man's ears and mouth, he gave the man a whole new life. He gave him the miracle of hearing and speech. For most of us who are lucky enough to have our hearing and our speech we may take these senses for granted. Even though we may have our hearing and speech intact we may still block our ears or stay silent by choice. Sometimes we choose not to hear what we don't want to hear. Or, we may not say something when we should. It is easy to turn our backs on uncomfortable situations. When we close our ears, block out others and refuse to listen, we are deaf. When we stay silent in the face of injustice, don't speak out about our beliefs or share our knowledge with others, we are mute.

Jesus cured the deaf-mute man with the miracle of his healing. Let us ask him to open our inner hearing to hear what he asks of us. Let us pray to Jesus to open our mouths to speak as he would like us to. Let us ask him to keep ourselves open to all that he wants of us.

Reflection Questions

- ◆ How in tune to your inner hearing are you? Do you ever hear God ask something of you?
- ◆ When have you heard someone speak up for an injustice in your community? How did the community respond?
- ◆ Have you witnessed an injustice that no one spoke up about? Describe the event.
- ◆ Do you, or someone you know, have hearing loss? What are the most difficult issues associated with your/their hearing loss?

Suggestions for Action

- ◆ Get involved with the Office for Social Justice in your archdiocese or religious community. Ask about volunteer opportunities.
- ◆ Remain silent for one hour, or one day if you can, this week. Write down your feelings about the experience and share with your group.

- ◆ Start a collection to purchase a hearing aid for a member of your church or community who can't afford one.

HEAR THE LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing, the leader poses these questions: "How has the sharing from this session affected you?", "How will it change you this week?" The leader allows a moment for members to reflect before inviting them to share their thoughts. The leader reads a selection from the readings aloud. Following the reading, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What is Jesus saying to you?", "What is your response?" The community pauses to reflect on these questions. A brief instrumental selection may be played during this time. After a time of reflection, the leader invites members to share what they hear Christ saying to them.)

Closing Prayer

(The leader plays the song "Forever" found at www.insightsbooks.com. Click on the Music link and select the appropriate week. After the song is complete, members alternate reciting the following prayer.)

Hear Us O Lord

- I: Hear our prayers, O Lord.
As we cry out to you.
- II: We open our hearts, tortured by pain.
- III: Lift us up, out of ourselves.
- I: Give us the strength, to fight for the truth.
- II: Open our eyes, to see what is right.
- III: Guide us to hear, your words of love.
- All: As we walk together, in the darkness, towards your heavenly light. Amen.

(Members exchange a sign of peace. The candle is extinguished.)