

XII Trinity 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

II Cor. 3.4-11 St. Mark 7.31-37

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Imagine what it would be like to be isolated from your family and friends because you could not hear or speak well. Imagine what it would be like to live in a world where you were...through no fault of your own...a social and religious outcast. That's the kind of world the man in today's Gospel lived in...he was a virtual pariah to those around him.

Mark is the only Gospel writer who records Jesus healing the man who couldn't hear or speak clearly. He may have had partial hearing at one time. We learn how to say words when we hear them. We don't know what caused his hearing loss...we are only told he could hardly speak.

Jesus and his disciples have just left Tyre and Sidon in the northern part of Galilee and are on their way south toward the Sea of Galilee. They are passing through Decapolis (Ten Towns). The Ten Towns were Greek city-states east of the Jordan River in present day Jordan, Syria and Israel. This was Gentile territory.

Mark doesn't explicitly say the man in the Gospel was a Gentile, but the location of the healing miracle strongly suggests he was. It would not have mattered whether he was a Jew, Gentile or Samaritan. Anyone with the physical challenges he faced would have been someone to avoid.

The man had some friends...they were his advocates. They begged Jesus to heal him. Rather than putting on a show for the crowd, Jesus takes the man off into the distance. Jesus did this out of compassion, dignity and respect for the man. He knew the man would be overwhelmed when he was suddenly able to hear and speak again. He wanted to calm any fears he might have.

Jesus did something remarkable. He touched the man's ears and spit and touched the man's tongue and said, "*Ephphatha*"...Aramaic for "Open up!" Jesus wasn't afraid to touch the man everyone else considered a nuisance. Jesus never said no to someone who asked for healing...regardless of who they were or where they were born.

The Gospel tells us the man was able to hear and he could now talk without any trouble. In healing the man, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy written 700 years earlier...*"The blind will be able to see, and the deaf will hear. Those who cannot walk will leap and dance, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy."* The crowd who witnessed this miracle could not contain themselves. They shouted, *"Look how well he does everything."*

Today we have devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants that help people hear better, and technological wonders that help people speak better. These devices are no less miraculous than the healing in today's Gospel. We hope and pray they help people with physical challenges feel less isolated from the world around them. God has given us science too...and for that we must always thank and praise him.

Jesus healed the man and he could hear and speak well. He restored the man to his community and social life. Jesus demonstrated a radical re-interpretation of Jewish Law...where love is the foundation of all relationships. And the healing shows Jesus has the power to heal any part of the body that isn't working...mind, body and soul.

Mark tells us after Jesus healed the man he told the crowd not to say anything about what they had just witnessed. The man in the Gospel received more than a physical healing. Jesus said, "Open up!" The healing miracle is also about being spiritually "opened" to hearing God's word and then taking it out into the world.

We are under no restrictions to keep quiet about Jesus and his power to heal. We must tell others what we know to be true...Jesus is the one we can go to when we are tired from carrying life's heavy loads and he will give us rest! He will help us sort things out. He will help us restore order to our lives.

We have five senses...they are all involved in one way or another in what we do here today. And if one of our senses isn't working the way we would like it to...we still have the others...and we can use them to tell the world about Jesus. What will we say?

..."Look...how well he does everything!"

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