

XII Trinity 2024
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
St. Mark 7.31-37

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There are only two places in the Gospels...both in Mark...where it is recorded Jesus sighs. Sighing is a long deep audible breath. We sigh for different reasons...when we are sad, tired or frustrated. We are communicating how we feel in a non-verbal way.

In this morning's Gospel Jesus is heading south from Tyre and Sidon (in Modern Lebanon) through Decapolis...the area of the Ten Towns. He and the disciples are on their way to Lake Galilee and eventually Jerusalem. The Ten Towns were centers of Greek and Roman culture and include the modern-day cities of Amman, Jordan and Damascus, Syria. This was Gentile territory.

Mark tells us that as Jesus and his friends were traveling along some people brought him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak. The fact he couldn't speak well suggests he was not born deaf. The Gospel doesn't tell us under what circumstances he lost his hearing...but it was early enough in his life to have affected his speech. He was also a Gentile.

The people who brought the man to Jesus begged him to place his hands on the man and heal him. The Gospel tells us Jesus took him away from the crowd. He was not interested in putting on a show for the people. His healing miracles weren't about him...they were about the people he healed. Later the religious leaders would demand Jesus perform some miracles...and Jesus sighed...out of frustration!

Jesus put his hands in the man's ears, he spit and touched the man's tongue...and he looked up to heaven and sighed. This was no ordinary sigh...Jesus let out a deep gut-wrenching groan. He was feeling such intense emotion and compassion for the man. He spoke to him in Aramaic and said "*Ephphatha*" (*Eph-PHA-thah*), which means "*Open up!*" Not only could the man HEAR, he could SPEAK without any trouble. Jesus told the people to keep quiet...but they didn't...they were amazed at what they saw.

The Gospel doesn't tell us what the man who had just been healed did after Jesus restored his hearing and speech. Was this a spiritual awakening for him? His life was certainly changed for the better. He was made whole again. Did he know it was God himself who had healed him? Did he thank Jesus for healing him? We hope he did.

In healing the man in today's Gospel Jesus made the prophecies from Isaiah...*blind people will see again and deaf people will hear again...*and from Ezekiel...*people will get back the power of speech and be able to talk clearly again...*come true.

Jesus spent much of his life on Earth healing people. The man he healed in today's Gospel was a Gentile. This tells us Jesus healed anyone who came to him for help. It didn't matter who they were or where they lived. And he healed the man in Gentile territory. The healing ministry of Jesus was not restricted to one group of people or one location.

The healing ministry of Jesus is evident in the Church today. Saint Joseph Parish has a long tradition of praying for those we have been asked to pray for. We have a list of people we pray for...some we know...some we don't know. We don't really need to know their names or specifics about their illnesses or other needs. We pray for them and our prayers increase our faith in God's power to heal in mind, body and soul.

The people who brought the man to Jesus for healing asked him to lay his hands on him. Priests are often asked to lay hands on people for healing and this is always done when we visit people in the hospital. The laying on of hands is not a magic act. It is done in the Name of the Holy Trinity and follows Saint James' instructions that the people who need healing should ask the priest to lay his hands on them and anoint them with oil.

Jesus told the people not to say anything about the healing they had just witnessed. We are not under the same constraints. We should not hold back and should always be ready to broadcast the Good News about Jesus and say...LOOK HOW WELL GOD DOES EVERYTHING!

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