

## 23<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B

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

Excerpts from Pope Francis – Angelus – 09 Sept 2018

by Father Charles Fillion

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Brothers and sisters, in the Gospel of Mark, there are a lot of healings by Jesus. Those healings are always done through words and gestures. When we celebrate a sacrament, it is always done with words and gestures. The majority of the sacraments are celebrated in front of people, while some are more discreet, as the Anointing of the Sick. And that is what Jesus does today. He took the man aside, far from the crowd, so he can act discreetly. He does not want to impress people; He is not seeking popularity or success, but wishes only to do good to people. With this attitude, He teaches us that *good is to be done without clamour*, without “blowing one’s own trumpet”. It should be done quietly.

It could also be that he doesn’t want others to see what he is going to do. To put his fingers in the deaf man’s ears and touched his tongue with saliva, this will certainly raise a lot of questions. But the answer is very simple. This gesture refers to the Incarnation. The Son of God is a man inserted into human reality: he became man; he can understand another man’s distressing condition and intervene with a gesture which concerned his own humanity. At the same time, Jesus wanted to make it understood that the miracle occurred in union with the Father: for this reason, he looked up to heaven. He then sighed and said the key word: “*Ephphatha*”, which means “Be opened”. And immediately the man was healed: his ears were opened; his tongue was released. The sacrament is always effective. But sometimes it’s not as visible, but the healing is there. For him the healing was also an “opening” to others and to the world.

So, we have here *a twofold healing*. First, the healing from illness and from physical suffering, in order to restore bodily health. Yes, we know that this aim is not completely achievable on earth, despite the many efforts of science and medicine. But there is a second, perhaps more difficult healing, and it is healing from fear. Healing from the fear that impels us to marginalize the sick, to put aside the suffering, the disabled. And there are many ways to marginalize, even by showing fake compassion or by ignoring the problem; we remain deaf and dumb to the suffering of people marked by illness, anguish and difficulty. Too often the sick and the suffering become a problem, while they should be an occasion to show a society’s concern and solidarity with regard to the weakest.

Jesus revealed to us the secret of a miracle that we too can imitate, becoming protagonists of “*Ephphatha*”, of that phrase ‘be opened’ with which He gave speech and hearing back to the man. It means opening ourselves to the needs of our suffering brothers and sisters and in need of help, by refusing selfishness and hardheartedness. It is precisely the heart, that is the deep core of the person, that Jesus came to “open”, to free, in order to make us capable of fully living the relationship with God and with others. He became man so that we, rendered internally deaf and mute by sin, may hear the voice of God, the voice of Love that speaks to his heart, and thereby in turn, may learn to speak the language of love, transforming it into gestures of generosity and self-giving.

Therefore, let us experience, in faith, the miracle of “*Ephphatha*”, in order to live in communion with God and with our brothers and sisters.