



September 9, 2018

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #128B

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Psalms 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

James 2:1-5

Mark 7:31-37

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

Providing opportunities for others is another way we live the word. In Jesus' day people who were deaf or hearing impaired had few opportunities. Begging was often the only option available to them. Thus, by opening up the man's ears, Jesus also opened up his opportunities. Today deaf and hearing-impaired people have far more opportunities available to them. In fact, some would even challenge Mark's assumption that deafness is a condition to be "cured." And that is the point: Everyone has the chance to live the word in his or her own special way.

Q FOCUS: *To open ourselves to others in need.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On Friday, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This feast began as a commemoration of a unique event: the miraculous finding of the True Cross by St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine.

Church Teaching Connection

"The obligation to evaluate social and economic activity from the viewpoint of the poor and the powerless arises from the radical command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Those who are marginalized and whose rights are denied have privileged claims if society is to provide justice for *all*. This obligation is deeply rooted in Christian belief" (*Economic Justice for All*, 87).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 7:31-37

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Again Jesus left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" —that is, "Be opened!" —And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he

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REFLECTION

We often judge those who are different from us. Sometimes we do it because we are scared or insecure. Sometimes we do it because we have not taken the time to get to know someone. James reminds the early followers of Jesus to avoid stereotyping others and to welcome those we judge as less than us. In high school, it is often difficult to break out of social groups because of the fear of being judged by others. When we challenge ourselves to being open to someone new (for example, maybe sit at a different table), we are helping to bring about the Kingdom of God. In today's Gospel, Jesus heals the deaf man with the speech impediment. We can be like Jesus if we reach out to those in need or those who are left on the fringes (such as another student who is sitting alone in class or at lunch). Sometimes it seems impossible to branch out. But our faith in Jesus calls us to be bold and to reach out to those in need. By doing so, we bring Jesus' love more fully to our neighbor. The way we live our Christian faith will impact others' lives.

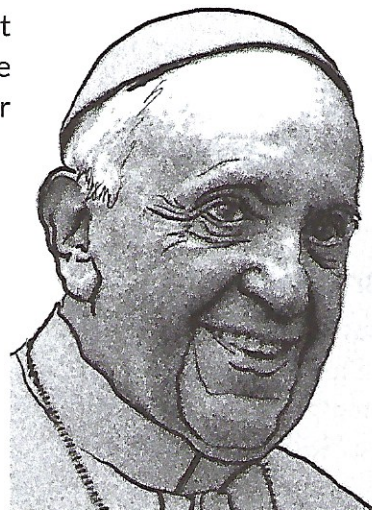


ACTION

Try sitting with someone new in class or at lunch. It sounds cliché, but it can take a lot of strength to step out of our comfort zone and interrupt another person's routine. If you know something about the person, ask about that (like the play they are in or the sport they play). While it may seem impossible, or a social faux pas, you might surprise yourself. Not only will it impact another person's life positively, but you will plant a seed in those who notice. You never know, it might start a movement!

In 2017, Pope Francis called upon all teens to stop bullying: "Promise me, never, never mock or make fun of someone; a companion at school or in your neighborhood. . . . Do you promise this, today? . . . Do you promise Jesus?"

Read what the pope said here:



<http://aleteia.org/2017/03/27/pope-francis-promise-jesus-and-promise-me-that-you-will-never-bully/>



QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Who in your community might need healing right now?
- ❖ How might you ease their pain?

ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Begin by inviting the young people to cover their ears, and then proceed to say something to them in a whisper. After a few moments, stop and signal for them to uncover their ears.

► What were you able to hear?

This experience only touches briefly on what it means to be hearing-impaired. The character in today's Gospel is both deaf and has a speech impediment (his speech is affected because of his deafness). The people bring this man to Jesus for him to heal, and Jesus takes the man off away from the crowd.

► What does Jesus do next? (Places his fingers in the man's ear and then, spitting, he touches the man tongue.)

This passage is unique to Mark's account of the Gospel. Jesus does not usually heal this way, Mark's account of the Gospel is meant for more than the Jewish community. This Gospel account tells us that Jesus reaches out to the Gentiles as well. Once the man can hear, he orders him to tell no one.

► If you were the one born deaf and mute, what would you do?

► What about all those who knew you, what would their reaction be?

► Could you and would they be quiet about this wonderful gift you have been given?

To be deprived of the gift of sight, hearing, or speech locks someone in a world that is silent and dark. Jesus' gift of healing not only opens eyes and ears and frees speech, but it also opens minds and hearts to God, allowing people to experience God in this world interacting and respecting others regardless of differences.

The practice of serving the poor is not new, nor was it a concept introduced by Jesus. Throughout human history, people have been concerned with caring for the most vulnerable members of their community. Jesus' example, though, encourages us to open ourselves to others in need, no matter who they are, whether they are part of our own family or group or not. We are bound by our belief in Christ to assist those who are poor, and to care for others not from our excess, but as part of our daily routine (see *Gaudium et Spes*, 69).

► How can we be blind to the needs of others.

► How can we be deaf to those who need our help.

► How can we be mute when someone needs us to speak out for them.

► How can we help each other to remain open to God?

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 26.

How can we use our hands to touch others and bring wellness to the world?

Who needs Jesus' healing touch from you?

What stops you from seeing and hearing God's will?

What impedes your hearing regarding what is right?

What impedes your speech when talking about God's ways?

Act on the Word

Ephphatha Stickers

You will need one sheet of blank stickers or labels for each young person and markers to lead this activity.

Give each young person a sheet of blank stickers or labels and markers. Write the word EPHPHATHA in large letters where the young people can see it, and tell them that they are to be creative and create stickers or labels with this phrase written on them. When they are finished, tell them to take their stickers home and put them as reminders in any place where they need to be more open to God. For example, they might place one in their locker to remind them to be more open to the needs of others at school, on their cell phone to remind them to listen closely to the needs of those who call them, or on their laptop to remind them to stick up for anyone who is getting picked on online.

“Be Open” Skits

Divide the young people into small groups. Brainstorm for a few moments about specific situations in which we might choose to be blind, deaf, or mute rather than acting as a disciple of Jesus. Ask each group to choose one of the situations and come up with a brief skit about it, demonstrating how someone is blind to the needs of others, deaf to those who need help, or mute when someone needs them to speak out. The skit should also show how that person can be opened. Allow each group the opportunity to perform their skit, then ask them how it felt to act it out. When each group has completed their skit, engage the group in a discussion about the skits. Did they feel the skits were realistic? Can they name more ways to handle the situation? Have any of them ever been involved in a similar situation? What happened?

Closing Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ,
out of loving mercy,
you healed all the distressed,
and you opened the ears
and loosened the tongue of the man
who could neither hear nor speak.
Open our ears anew this day,
so that we might hear your Word,
and touch our tongue so that every sound we make
might give praise and glory to God.
You live and reign for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.