

# Read

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Psalms 146:6c-7, 8-9a,  
9b-10

James 2:1-5

Mark 7:31-37

## Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 8, 2024



### REFLECTION

One of the interesting facets of Mark's Gospel is this "messianic secret." Again and again, after performing a miracle, Jesus instructs the healed person and the bystanders to not say anything. The more Jesus says "don't," the more people *do* spread the word. It's a puzzling dynamic; Jesus gives a direct order that people fail to follow, but he doesn't seem bothered by it enough to make healing conditional on anonymity. Why the repeated requests to keep it secret?

Many scholars believe this is a particular style of writing that helps the readers, both in ancient times and today, to redefine their expectations of a messiah. Jesus wasn't going to be a political leader like many people wanted. Rather, his identity as the Messiah is revealed throughout the Gospels as the Son of God who suffers and dies for our salvation. *This* is the understanding of his identity that he wanted to share; before his ascension into heaven, Jesus tells the disciples to go proclaim that Good News to the whole world. We are invited to do the same.

### ACTION

Reflect on the word *Ephphatha* (Mark 7:34) that is used in today's reading. The text explains that this means "Be opened" (Mark 7:34). It is an interesting word choice, not only for a miracle healing, but also for our journey of faith. If Jesus told you to "be open," what might he be talking about? What kind of attitude do you bring to the different areas of your life—family, school, faith, friends? Are you open minded? Are you open to talking about your faith with others? Are you open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?



**"How Could I Be Silent"—Caitie Hurst <https://youtu.be/KU2HYAy2wY8>**

### QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How do you share good news with others?
- ❖ How can you be open to God's presence at the Mass? At home? At school?



September 8, 2024

# TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## LECTIONARY #128B

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Psalms 146: 6c-7, 8-9a, 9b-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

In today's Gospel, Jesus heals a man in the territory of the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). Even though these people are not part of God's chosen people, they recognize his power and seek his healing presence. They bring him a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. In a remarkable and detailed encounter, Jesus heals the man, touching his ears, his tongue, spitting, and groaning. The people can't help but share this news, even though Jesus tells them not to. The teens are invited to reflect on Jesus' actions and their effects and consider what it means to allow Jesus to touch their lives and open them to the work of the Spirit.

**Q FOCUS:** *Be open to Jesus' presence in your life.*

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

On September 14, the Church celebrates the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, a feast that honors the finding of the cross on which Christ was crucified. It was found by St. Helena, mother to Emperor Constantine, when she went to Jerusalem in the fourth century to visit the holy sites of Jesus' life and death. After tearing down a pagan temple that had been constructed on the site of Jesus' crucifixion so that they could build a church instead, they found pieces of three crosses underneath it. They

discovered which cross was Christ's because a dying woman was healed after touching it.

### Church Teaching Connection

"Often we are drawn up and closed in on ourselves, and we create many inaccessible and inhospitable islands. . . . However, at the beginning of our Christian life, at baptism, it is precisely this gesture and word of Jesus that are present: 'Ephphatha!' 'Be opened!'. And behold the miracle has been worked. We are healed of the deafness of selfishness and the impediment of being closed in on ourselves, and of sin, and we have been inserted into the great family of the Church" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, September 6, 2015).

## 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 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:*

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, in the land of the Gentiles (non-Jewish people) rather than in the land of the Jewish people. It might seem odd that Jesus, who was a Jew and who was sent to save the Jewish people, would be in the land of the Gentiles. Why would he be welcomed there? Why would they believe he could do anything miraculous? Surprisingly, we hear that the crowds came, seeking Jesus. They knew of him and had enough faith in his actions that they brought the sick to him.

► **When have you encountered God’s presence in a seemingly unlikely place?**

They bring to him a man who is deaf, whose ears are closed. Jesus takes him away from the crowd and then performs an elaborate ritual. We have read that Jesus heals through his words, from a distance, and even without planning on doing so when someone just touched his cloak. In today’s reading, we have an account of a healing that is very detailed. Jesus places his finger in the man’s ears, spits, touches the man’s tongue, and groans, all before healing him.

► **What is your reaction to this description?**

Jesus’ actions might seem a bit theatrical to us. Why does he do all these things when he could just say “Be healed” and the man would be healed? Isn’t he God?

Jesus doesn’t need to do these things, but they offer the crowd a comparison with what some other “healers” of the time might have been doing. While those other healers were doing these actions for show and could not really heal, Jesus uses the actions to bring attention to his healing, which accomplishes what he says it will. The man can now hear, he can now speak.

Also, consider the actions from the man’s point of view. Jesus brings you close. You can’t hear what the crowd is saying, but you realize that something big is about to happen. This man could heal you! Jesus touches those places that have kept you separated from society and are in need of healing, your ears, your tongue. Through Jesus’ actions, you know what is about to happen, you know that Jesus has power to restore you to greater participation in the life of the community. He speaks a word and suddenly you can hear! You can speak!

What a sight to behold, for those watching. Jesus’ word, “Ephphatha” (“be opened”), accomplishes what it means. The man’s ears and mouth are opened to hear and speak. The minds and hearts of those in the crowd are opened to belief in Jesus.

► **With these perspectives in mind, what is your reaction now to the process of the healing?**

Jesus’ actions and words are powerful. They are not only meant for those in his day, but for us today as well. Oddly, Jesus’ next words seem to invite the opposite of being open. He tells the people not to tell anyone what happened. But they can’t help themselves. Once they have been opened, once the man himself had been opened to hear and see, they can’t stay quiet; they encountered a miracle and want to tell everyone about it.

► **Have you ever experienced something so wonderful you couldn’t keep it to yourself?**

The Lord knows what we need to be healed of in our lives so that we can be more open to him. In faith, our friends or family members may even be bringing those things to God in prayer, just like the crowd

brought the man to Jesus. Sometimes our faith needs the help of the faith of others. Oftentimes, we close ourselves off to Jesus' power. We might think our sin is too great. We might think that we are not important enough. Maybe we have closed ourselves off to God's love. But Jesus is always there offering his words of love and healing. He wants to restore us to full participation in the community of believers by healing us of the things that keep us apart. He invites us to be open to his Spirit working in our lives.

## 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.

**Jesus heals through his words and actions.**

**Both the man and the crowd were opened to the work of God present in their midst.**

**We are invited to be open to receive healing from Jesus.**

## Act on the Word

### Whisper Challenge

For this activity, you will need headphones and a device that can play music through the headphones. You might want to ask the teens to bring in their own headphones and phones for this. You will also need to prepare a list of notecards that have phrases written on them (see below for examples).

This activity is a take on the popular "Whisper Challenge" game. The goal of this game is for someone to guess what another person is saying by reading their lips.

Begin by preparing a stack of notecards with phrases written on them. These phrases should relate to Scripture, the Catholic faith, and other relevant faith-based topics. Some examples include phrases like, "blessed are the poor in spirit," "love your neighbor," "seven sacraments," "and with your

spirit," "the ten commandments," and so on. You can make it easier for the teens to guess these by showing them all the options before beginning the game or by giving them a category of phrases such as "things Jesus said."

Divide the group into two teams. Have one volunteer from each team sit on a chair in front of his or her team, facing one another. One of the volunteers (the guesser) will be wearing headphones with music playing in them. The other volunteer (the clue giver) will be given a notecard. The clue giver will whisper the words on the notecard, while the person with the headphones on tries to read the clue giver's lips and guess the phrase. The guesser gets three chances to correctly guess what is being said. If he or she does not correctly guess it, the volunteers switch roles, and a new card is given to the new clue giver. If the new clue is not guessed, new volunteers are chosen and a new round begins. If at any point the guesser correctly guesses the phrase, that team gets a point and new volunteers are chosen for the next round.

## Closing Prayer

*In your great mercy, O God,  
you desire to restore all things through  
Jesus Christ, your Son.*

*Grant that we might be open to seeing  
your loving plan  
as it unfolds in the lives of all those who  
seek salvation.*

*Through Christ our Lord.  
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](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.