

Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time-B

Mark 7:31-37

Dear Friends,

In the time of Jesus, the people had a much more extensive conviction about the devil than is the case in our day. They viewed the basic conflict of good and evil as a struggle between God and the power of darkness residing in the demons.

Sickness, political domination and the endless challenges of nature and climate were all seen as expressions of demonic control over human freedom. The Messiah was seen as one who would finally terminate this never-ending struggle. He would bring back the original freedom of the Garden of Eden.

All of Jesus' actions were a movement toward human freedom from this deeply entrenched control of the demon. Today's healing of the deaf mute would have been seen as an exorcism that set the victim free of the demonic bondage.

The man's condition had left him in severe isolation. It is extremely difficult for us to imagine the destructive consequence of being unable to hear and unable to speak.

Jesus' action of healing is clearly part of the mission to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. (Mk 1:14-15) Jesus performs this miracle in a territory of Gentile dominance. This was another way he used to expand the horizons of his mission well beyond the limited vision of his followers. He was sowing the seeds of the shattering reality that salvation was for all people not just the Jewish nation. The church Jesus calls us to will always strive to break the restrictions of culture and convention.

We should see ourselves in the deaf mute. We are often locked into a world muted by a message of consumerism and privilege and exclusion. We need Jesus to free us from the domination of a culture that muffles the cry of the poor while it proclaims a message of self-indulgence with a seemingly interminable array of new products that will guarantee our contentment. We live in a world where our voice to proclaim the message of the gospel is drained out by the noise of a culture that seeks always more comfort, more pampering and more security. Just like the mute and deaf character in our reading today, Jesus frees us to hear the liberating word of God and to draw us out isolation and into a saving community.

In our day, Jesus sets us free to enrich our relationships with truly human communication. This always involves a deeper ability to hear the other and an honesty to speak the truth no matter how painful. Jesus also sets us free for a life of service and witness to the good news of the gospel. This is only possible if we recognize the depth of our muteness and deafness when it comes to matters of the spirit. The first step for all of us is to accept that we need the healing power of Jesus to set us free.