

5 SEPTEMBER 2021

Sunday Message

23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year B • Psalter Week 3

JESUS A MAGICIAN?

(MARK 7:31-37)

Jesus continues his journey through Gentile territory. Mark gives us a particularly detailed account of Jesus healing a man who has no hearing and limited power of speech.

This recalls the promise in Isaiah of the signs which will accompany the saving coming of God to Israel. The reaction of the crowd that Jesus “has done all things well” reminds us of God surveying the completed Creation. Mark’s vivid presentation has a couple of interesting features which would not be surprising in a setting familiar with stories of healing by magic: the groaning by Jesus, the placing of his finger in the ears, and the anointing of the person’s tongue with spittle. However, Jesus cures the person by speaking, by word. Jesus is therefore superior to any pagan healers, just as Moses and Aaron are vindicated in their competition with the Egyptian magicians.

We find another Markan motif in this episode: Jesus enjoins silence about what has happened on those who have witnessed it, only for this to have the opposite effect. This is part of the “Messianic Secret”: most likely, it expresses Mark’s concern that people (then and now) should not understand Jesus as being the Son of God simply because he can work miracles. Jesus’ true identity as God’s Son will be revealed at the cross, when there is no further possibility of misunderstanding.

The Gentile audience reacts with enthusiasm to Jesus: this contrasts with Mark’s usual presenting of the disciples as failing to understand who Jesus is and the meaning of his actions. ■

SAY

“Speak, Lord, your servant can hear and is listening.”
(see 1 Samuel 3:10)

DO

Look up Tyre, Sidon and the Decapolis on a map of biblical lands: this will give you an idea of where Jesus carried out his ministry.

LEARN

Tyre and Sidon are non-Jewish coastal cities to the north-west of Galilee.

Decapolis means “Ten Cities”, although there is no fixed list of these towns: it refers to an area on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and the River Jordan.

The important point about all these places is that they are largely Gentile.

REFLECT

Miracles in the Gospel tradition and text are described as *works of power*: they are signs of the kingdom of God breaking through into human life and confronting sickness and death. The person in the Gospel extract today is now able to communicate fully with those around him; the restrictions on his everyday relationships have been lifted.

It is a great temptation for preachers and teachers to emphasise Jesus’ ability to perform such actions as revealing Jesus as the Son of God. But there is a very fine line between presenting these as

signs of the kingdom and (inadvertently) giving the idea that Jesus could work magic, which might be the reason why neither Matthew nor Luke includes this graphically detailed story in their own Gospel accounts. Mark’s theme about Jesus’ paradoxical insisting on not publicising accounts of healings or other experiences (the “Messianic Secret”) only makes sense in such a setting.

When we read or listen to the Gospels, the evangelists want us to ask ourselves, “What does this mean?” not “Did it actually happen?” That Jesus worked what we call “miracles” is very much part

of the Gospel tradition. But miracles are symbolic of what Jesus’ ministry is all about: they are recorded as catechetical aids which show God’s kingdom breaking into situations where human beings are in need. Mark shows Jesus going beyond the confines of his own people and land and confronting suffering in those places as well as preaching the word of God. Perhaps it might remind us that our Church is called to be like the Master, who goes out to others and is not concerned simply with “spiritual” matters, but with confronting human suffering and injustice as well. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

You are just, O Lord, and your judgement is right;
treat your servant in accord with your merciful love.

GLORIA

Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

COLLECT

O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption,
look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters,
that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom and an everlasting inheritance.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 35:4-7

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Say to all faint hearts,
"Courage! Do not be afraid.

"Look, your God is coming,
vengeance is coming,
the retribution of God;
he is coming to save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
the ears of the deaf unsealed,
then the lame shall leap like a deer
and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy;
for water gushes in the desert,
streams in the wasteland,
the scorched earth becomes a lake,
the parched land springs of water.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 145

Response:

My soul, give praise to the Lord.

or

Alleluia!

1. It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever,
who is just to those who are oppressed.
It is he who gives bread to the hungry,
the Lord, who sets prisoners free. (R.)

2. It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind,
who raises up those who are bowed down,
the Lord who loves the just,
the Lord, who protects the stranger. (R.)

3. The Lord upholds the widow and orphan,
but thwarts the path of the wicked.
The Lord will reign for ever,
Zion's God, from age to age. (R.)

SECOND READING

James 2:1-5

A reading from the letter of St James.

My brothers, do not try to combine faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord, with the making of distinctions between classes of people. Now suppose a man comes into your synagogue, beautifully dressed and with a gold ring on, and at the same time a poor man comes in, in shabby clothes, and you take notice of the well-dressed man, and say, "Come this way to the best seats;" then you tell the poor man, "Stand over there" or "You can sit on the floor by my foot-rest." Can't you see that you have used two different standards in your mind, and turned yourselves into judges, and corrupt judges at that?

Listen, my dear brothers: it was those who are poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be the heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

Speak, Lord, your servant is listening:
you have the message of eternal life.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mark 7:31-37

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. Their admiration was unbounded. "He has done all things well," they said "he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;

through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,

he suffered death and was buried,

and rose again on the third day

in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory

to judge the living and the dead

and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son is adored

and glorified,

who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins

and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

O God, who give us the gift of true prayer and of peace,

graciously grant that, through this offering,
we may do fitting homage to your divine majesty

and, by partaking of the sacred mystery,
we may be faithfully united in mind and heart.

Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Like the deer that yearns for running streams,

so my soul is yearning for you, my God;
my soul is thirsting for God, the living God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Grant that your faithful, O Lord,
whom you nourish and endow with life
through the food of your Word and heavenly

Sacrament,
may so benefit from your beloved Son's great gifts

that we may merit an eternal share in his life.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen.

It is the saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the ordinary duties of the day well. A short road to perfection – short, not because easy, but because pertinent and intelligible. There are no short ways to perfection, but there are sure ones.

St John Henry Newman