

A Deep Sigh of Release

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time year B

Mark 7: 31-37

Jesus the great healer—and don't we all love a good healing.

Bring it on!

“Heal me Lord. Help me with my baggage!”

Forget not, however, that these healings are for *relational purposes*.

It brings Jesus joy to heal, but there is more.

Healing brings God joy because healing is an act of love,
and the consequence of love is joy.

In healing us, Jesus loves us and, *by consequence*, is joyous.

But, beyond the joy, beyond the joyous healing, is love.

And love creates relationship.

These healings are for relational purposes.

Let us see what happens in this encounter...

Jesus arrives in the district of Decapolis, pagan territory.

Moved by something

(it is hard to know if they have already witnessed Jesus healing),
people bring to Jesus a disabled man:

disabled in hearing and disabled in speaking.

These un-named people bring an un-named man,
and beseech Jesus to lay hands on him

They request the traditional gesture of healing.

Jesus agrees to their request.

This is interesting, for

-
- the deaf and mute man does not himself request.
 - the deaf and mute man does not manifestly express faith.
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Jesus agrees, Jesus responds

to the stirrings in the hearts of these *other* people.

Hmmmm

- the power of intercession
- the mercy of God who is moved by our love for others,
such that He responds to them

Jesus then takes the man alone, apart.

Why?

The previous healing occurred right in the market-place.

Is Jesus now tired of crowds?

This is simply what Jesus wants, what Jesus discerns right for this person.

Jesus wants a *tete-a-tete*, a one-on-one encounter.

We then witness two gestures—neither of which is the laying on of hands:

- fingers in the ears
- fingers with spittle on the tongue

two gestures which the disabled man receives, thus expressing faith.

Jesus directly touches that which represents the disability, the disabled sense

These gestures are very intimate.

You do not let just anyone in your ears and—all the less—in your mouth!

Why the spittle?

Is it not to signify the freeing of the tongue,

with lubrication from His own tongue, the tongue which frees?

The gestures, however, are not all that there is.

They are accompanied by words—much like the Sacraments.

Jesus looks to heaven—which symbolizes God, and *groans*.

This action is divine.

But what's up with the groan?

I cannot help but think of Paul's reference

to the movement of the Holy Spirit within us as groanings.

Could it not also suggest that Jesus takes upon Himself the man's suffering?

The groan can also be considered a deep sigh.

Sighing is the manifest expression of release.

Jesus, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, in Himself, having taken it upon Himself,

releases the suffering, saying, "**Ephphathah.**" ("Be opened.")

[By the way: the rite of **Ephphathah** is incorporated into Baptism.]

The efficacy of Jesus' gestures, groan and words is immediate.

The man is healed.

Jesus concludes by ordering that nothing be said about the healing.

So much for that!

What do they do? Blab!

How odd to see Jesus not in control.

Actually, it is never about control.

Jesus is not trying to control the events,

but simply inviting these people to savor the personal experience.

Because of their joy, however, they cannot but share the good news...

Where do we fit in this?

Sometimes we are “the people”, sometimes we are the deaf and mute man. We are revealed how much God is touched by our love for one another, so much so that, when we bring Him someone, He touches that person, and the person need not say a thing.

We are revealed how concretely and how intimately God wishes to touch us. God wants to stick his fingers in our ears and put his spittle on our tongue.

True love is gratuitous.

True love flows freely.

True love is real and concrete and intimate.

This is awesome, but there are questions for each of us:

- Do we receive the love?
- Do we let ourselves be touched by God?
- Do we let God into the more intimate “places” of our person?
- Do we trust that we can be healed of all that hinders us from receiving and giving?

It is really very simple.

All we must do is present ourselves and/or others and we will be touched.

All we must do is be honest about any reticence or difficulty in trusting.

Such honest expression already opens us to God’s healing touch.

God, Jesus will take care of the rest.

All we need is faith the size of a mustard seed, and we all have faith the size of a mustard seed...