

September 4, 1994

James 2:1-5

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

Mark 7:31-37

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the real needs that your children (or associates) have? How do you distinguish these needs from the wants they express?
2. What healing would you ask for yourself in order to overcome the "speech impediment" that keeps you from proclaiming God's goodness, as you see it in those closest to you?
3. How are you deaf to the needs of those closest to you? How are deaf to the needs of the poor?

Mary Kay Niewrzal and Rose Mullen

September 11, 1994

James 2:14-18

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

Mark 8:27-35

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Whom do you admire because of their faith? How do you see that faith in action?
2. How can we come to know God's way of thinking, God's standards, so we can judge by them?
3. How, by our works, is our parish showing what we believe about Jesus?
4. Imagine Jesus turning to you and asking, "Who do you think that I am?" What is your response?

Diane Banks and Katie Radford

It's a secret; don't tell anyone

THE
GOOD
NEWS

GOD'S WORD ON
EVERYDAY LIVING



By Father Paul Turner

I'LL TELL YOU a secret if you promise not to tell anyone. Just don't say you heard it from me.

I knew if you read that first paragraph, you'd read the second.

Secrets are as fun to hear as they are to tell. This problem faces Jesus in the Gospel these next two Sundays. The two episodes happen almost a chapter apart in Mark, but in each case, Jesus is trying to get people to just shut up.

First we meet a person who is hearing impaired and has a speech impediment (7:31-37). By this point in the Gospel, we can predict what will happen. The problem is identified, Jesus cures it, proof of the cure happens, and the crowd reacts. Once the evangelists found this formula to tell the healing stories, they rarely changed it.

A closer look reveals some interesting tidbits, though. For example, the story begins with some geographical references. Look these cities up sometime. Mark has Jesus going in circles. It makes us wonder why? Did Jesus get lost? Did Mark lose his map when he wrote this section? Or is Jesus walking all around Gentile territory as a teaser for the future ministry of the Church?

So far, Mark has kept Jesus in Galilee, working with the Jews. All that will change shortly. This is the last episode before the big switch in Mark's gospel -- but I'm getting ahead of myself.

JESUS TAKES the disabled person off alone, a hint that he'll be trying to contain rumors about what will follow. Then, he conducts the most bizarre ritual in the Gospel: He sticks his fingers in the deaf ears, touches the enfeebled tongue with spit (Does he spit in this person's face?), groans loud enough for heaven to hear, and then says, "Ephphatha." (Kids, this is for professionals only. Do not try this at home.)

It works, however strange his method. The proof of the miracle comes in the demonstration of good diction.

"Ephphatha," incidentally, is one of those words left untranslated in the Bible -- like Alleluia, Hosanna, and Amen. It probably had come into liturgical usage early on, and people preferred the actual expression

to a translation -- just as the animals serving the Lion King prefer saying "Hakuna matata" to "No worries." We may still say "Ephphatha" when we pray over babies and adults being baptized. (I don't know why, but we say the word before baptism for adults but after baptism for babies.) In baptism, it's a prayer that the new members of the Church will hear the word and proclaim it.

Finally, Jesus asks the crowd to tell no one what happened. Fat chance. They're off telling everyone he makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. This is an important proclamation, because it reminds people of prophecies in Isaiah which foretold the Messiah would do the same.

THAT BRINGS US to next Sunday's Gospel (Mark 8:27-35). Jesus asks who the disciples think he is, and Peter says "You're the Messiah."

This episode is the watershed of Mark's Gospel, coming almost exactly at the story's middle.

Everything's been leading up to this point, which launches the rest of the narrative. Even the geographical changes. This conversation takes place up in the north, in Caesarea Philippi. Now Jesus heads south to Jerusalem where he will meet his death. The first part of Mark's Gospel has asked who Jesus is. Once Peter tells us, the second part of the Gospel spirals down toward the inevitable finish of the Messiah's earthly life.

The word "Messiah" means "anointed." In Greek, it's "Christos," the word which gives us Jesus' title, Christ, and the name for the oil we use in our most solemn anointings, chrism.

KINGS BEGAN their service after being anointed with chrism. To call Jesus Messiah is to proclaim him king. But a fussy Jesus wants the disciples to pipe down about the whole business. No one will understand what kind of king he will be. The disciples hope for good connections in Jesus' court. But Jesus tells them immediately that he will suffer and die before he rises again. He will be a king who bleeds.

Wanting none of that, Peter suggests that Jesus change his image. Jesus, furious, gives Peter another title, much less glorious than the one Peter just gave him. Jesus calls Peter Satan. Those who reject the suffering Messiah have no part of his life.

Jesus' desire to hush people up shows his fear that they'll get the story wrong. They'll think he's a magician, a miracle worker, a political leader, a blueblood. He is not. He's his kind of Messiah, and people would not understand it till he rose from the dead.

Why did they reject the idea that their master would suffer? Partly because they loved him. Partly because they feared that one of his secrets might well be true: What happens to the master, happens to the disciple.

Father Paul Turner is pastor of St. John Francis Regis Parish, Kansas City. □

Daily Scripture Readings



Twenty Third Sunday
in Ordinary Time
Sunday, September 4
Isaiah 35:4-7
Psalms 146:7-10
James 2:1-5
Mark 7:31-37

Wednesday, September 7
1 Corinthians 7:25-31
Psalms 45:11-12, 14-17
Luke 6:20-26

Saturday, September 10
1 Corinthians 10:14-22
Psalms 116:12-13, 17-18
Luke 6:43-49

Monday, September 5
1 Corinthians 5:1-8
Psalms 5:5-6, 7, 12
Luke 6:6-11

Thursday, September 8
Micah 5:1-4
Psalms 13:6
Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23

Twenty Fourth Sunday in
Ordinary Time
Sunday, September 11
Isaiah 50:4-9
Psalms 116:1-6, 8-9
James 2:14-18
Mark 8:27-35

Tuesday, September 6
1 Corinthians 6:1-11
Psalms 149:1-6, 9
Luke 6:12-19

Friday, September 9
1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-27
Psalms 84:3-6, 8, 12
Luke 6:39-42