Closing Prayer

God of power and compassion,
in Christ you reveal your will
to heal and to save.
Open our ears to your redeeming word
and move our hearts by the strength of your love,
so that our every word and work may proclaim as Messiah
Jesus the Lord,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Ordinary Time 23, Year B. ICEL. 1997[3]

Proper 18
(Sunday between 4 and 10 September inclusive)
Ordinary Time, Week 23

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 35.4-7a	God is coming to save you
Psalm 146	Praise to God who helps
James 2.1-10[11-13] 14-17	Respect the poor and show your faith by good deeds
Mark 7.24-37	Jesus heals a Gentile girl, and a deaf man

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

The daughter of the Syrophoenician woman healed

²⁴Jesus set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' ²⁸But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' ²⁹Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter.' ³⁰So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Healing of the deaf man

³¹Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³²They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' ³⁵And

immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. [36]Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. [37]They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

Mark 7.24-37 NRSV[1]

Comments and Questions

Jesus leaves the region of Galilee to go into Gentile country – the area between Tyre and Sidon. We are not told why: perhaps he needed to find a quieter place, or perhaps Herod wanted to arrest him. Phoenicia covered much of what is today called Lebanon.

Jesus at first seems to decline to help the woman (who was Greek in terms of culture and Syro-Phoenician in terms of race). Was he trying to test her? Did he think that Jews were more important than Gentiles? However, by entering Gentile territory, he is bound to encounter Gentiles. Perhaps Jesus wasn't intending to reach the Gentiles, but saw his mission primarily as being to the Jews, due to the limited time he had available. The first Christians reached out beyond the Jews to the Greeks. e.g. 'to the Jews first and also to the Greeks' (Romans 1.16).[2] Jesus did heal the woman's daughter, as she requested. In Matthew's version of this story Jesus tells the woman that she has great faith (Matthew 15.21-28). The woman shows her faith by: (a)trusting Jesus; (b) being concerned for her daughter, not herself; (c) being persistent; (d) using her intelligence.

The 'devil' referred to is an 'evil sprit', as understood at the time. It can seem as though a malevolent external force is influencing or harming someone. Whatever we take to be the cause of the illness or disturbed behaviour, the point is that Jesus overcame the problem, demonstrating God's will and power to heal.

The Decapolis is the region of the 'ten towns', situated east of the Jordan, and including Damascus, Gerasa, and Gadara; it is another area with a Greek-speaking population.

Jesus used the normal routine of healers in the ancient world. Mark includes the actual Aramaic word used, *ephphatha*; it was believed that

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2 See also Acts 13.46; 18.6.

the word itself had power, translating it would take away its power.

Healing is intimately connected with salvation; the two words are interchangeable, indicating a mending of what is broken, reconciliation of what is divided.

Why did Jesus want the man to keep quiet about the healing?

Why does Mark emphasise Jesus' work as not just teaching but teaching and healing?

Quotations

1

Seeing, hearing, feeling are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle.

Walt Whitman, 1819–1892

2

God raises the level of the impossible.

Corrie Ten Boom, 1892–1983

3

All miracles are simply feeble lights like the beacons on our way to the port where shines the light, the total light of the resurrection.

Jacques Ellul, 1912–1994

4

Little saints also perform miracles.

Danish proverb

5

Owing to the excitement caused by several alleged miracles in the St Medard Cemetery in Paris in 1732, King Louis XV had this sign placed upon the locked gates: 'By order of the King, God is hereby forbidden to work miracles in this place.'

John Schmidt

Related topics

For further study: