



## Bible Study – Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

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“...then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!"-- that is, "Be opened!" -  
- And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke  
plainly. Mk. 7:34-35

### Reading I: Isaiah 35:4-7a

**Open up!** The command to be open is challenging. To be open is to be accessible, exposed, available, and even vulnerable. Pope Francis has encouraged us to be open to God's command for us to get out of the pews and evangelize. He encourages us to restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, and spread love. He encourages us to be poor among the poor, to include the excluded and preach peace. Our challenge, therefore, is to "be open" to God's presence, in our joys, successes, sorrows, and in each other's needs. To live in God's presence we must, **Open Up!**  
The first reading from Isaiah 35 shows a triumphant procession of a liberated people. It is in sharp contrast to Isaiah 34 that focuses on the



**BE OPEN!**

vindication of Israel, by the destruction of its enemies. The conquests by God of Israel's enemies opened the way for Israel to leave captivity and the pain of exile. Perhaps the author saw the destruction of Israel's enemies as a precondition to the joy and peace of liberation. Clearly, these verses from Chapter 35 are words of liberation. Israel must maintain its spiritual freedom by being open to God's plan for them. The hearts that were close by fear will be open to works of God (vv. 3-4). If they are open to Him, God will heal and deliver them. (See also Deut. 31:6-7, 23; Josh. 1:6-7, 9, 18; Rev. 13:9-10; 14:12). Israel could move from exile to freedom, from fear to courage, from despair to hope, from want to plenty, from sadness to joy. But first, they must, "be open" to Him. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Isaiah speaks of liberation from exile. Are you in spiritual exile in your parish? Can you be liberated from your sufferings, if you do not want to be? Does God have the power to open our closed hearts?

### Why Did Jesus Perform Miracles?

Jesus answered this question Himself. When in prison, John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to Jesus to see if He was the "one to come" (Matt 11:3). Jesus told them to inform John of what He had done: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (11:5). With these words, Jesus declared that His miracles were the fulfillment of the promises of the Messiah's kingdom as foretold by Isaiah (24:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1). Jesus' miracles were signs of the presence of the kingdom of God (Matt 12:39).

### Reading II: James 2:1-5

**OPEN UP!** To "open up" is to submit to the will of God. We cannot be open to God's purpose for us, if we are closed, indifferent, or hostile to others. This letter to James reminds us to be open to receive others into our homes, communities, parishes and hearts. These verses warned against choosing people based on appearances and status. We are warned not to claim to practice our faith, while showing personal prejudice against those whom God has favored. This is a conflict between love of God and love of neighbor. In the Christian community, there must not be any favoritism or discrimination based on wealth, status, or ethnicity (vv. 1-13).

In Chapter 1, James discussed hypocritical religiosity (1:26-27). In Chapter 2, he continues with the same admonition that prejudice and discrimination is a sin (v. 8). Prejudice and discrimination based on class, wealth, intelligence, race, gender, or religion, violates the command of God that we love others as we love ourselves (Lv. 19:18). Prejudice and favoritism are sinful, because this conduct blasphemes the name of God. God chose the poor to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom (v 5). We must, therefore, "Open Up" to favor God shows to others. **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:** Do you discriminate against others based on race, gender, age, ethnicity or social status? Is it a sin to do so?

**Gospel: Mark 7:31-37**

OPEN UP! We tend to think of salvation in terms of life after death and heaven. The readings this Sunday encourage us to be open to salvation and encounter the Living God every day of our lives. Isn't it time for us to "open up"? Just as Jesus commanded the ears of the deaf man to be opened. He now tells us to "open up" and hear His words of eternal life. Here is why we should listen to His command.

St. Mark embeds the words of Isaiah 35 into this miracle of Jesus as a revelation that Jesus is God. He emphasizes that this deaf man was incapable of speech using the term "μογιλαλος" or Mo-gi-la-los in verse 5. This word appears only twice in the Bible here in verse 5 and in Isaiah 35:6. Thus it is clear that Mark wants his audience to remember Isaiah 35, when we read this account of Jesus' healing of the deaf man.

When these words were first spoken in Isaiah 35, they signaled hope for, and a return of Israel after the Babylonian exile. In Jesus' day, these words signaled the restoration of the Messianic Age, the arrival of Jesus, the Christ.

This miracle describes Jesus' ability to heal physical ailments. It also shows Jesus' ability to heal spiritual deafness, muteness, blindness and other ailments of the soul. This healing comes only to those who are open to receive His healing.

Note that Jesus removes the mute man away from his surroundings. Verse 33 says, "He took him aside quietly." This shows that while Jesus separated the man from the community, He was open to healing this man physically and spiritually. The deaf man for his part, allowed himself to go with Jesus. He was open to the healing that would take place. This event shows that Jesus is open to all. He was not afraid to have physical contact with people regardless of race, gender, status or ethnicity. He loved His neighbor as Himself. This deaf man was not a Jew. He was from the region of the Decapolis, a region inhabited by Greeks, and other ethnicities. Jesus touched the man's tongue, put his finger into his ear, prayed and said, "be opened." *Ephphatha* is an Aramaic expression that Mark translates for his Gentile readers. This shows the openness of Mark's Gospel to all people.

Jesus admonition to tell no one in v. 37 shows His concern that the miracle would be given a divine purpose that is open and everlasting. He tells us to "open up." **DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Why did Jesus take the deaf mute aside away from others? Do you see a formula for spiritual healing in the way that Jesus healed the deaf man?

**Pray About It!**

**Monday**

Read Joshua 1:6-7. Speak positively to someone about your future.

**Tuesday**

Read Mark 7:31-37. Meditate on what these verses mean to you.

**Wednesday**

Read James 2:1-13 and perform an act of kindness to a person of a different race, or religion.

**Thursday**

Read Isaiah 35:3-4. Speak these words to someone today: "Your God has come to save you."

**Friday**

Spend thirty (30) minutes in silent prayer.

**Decapolis**

Decapolis means the ten cities. **deka** means, ten and **polis**, means a city, a district on the east and south-east of the Sea of Galilee containing "ten cities," which were chiefly inhabited by Greeks. It included a portion of Bashan and Gilead, and is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Matt 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31). These cities were Scythopolis, i.e., "city of the Scythians", (ancient Bethshean, the only one of the ten cities on the west of Jordan), Hippos, Gadara, Pella (to which the Christians fled just before the destruction of Jerusalem), Philadelphia (ancient Rabbath-ammon), Gerasa, Dion, Canatha, Raphana, and Damascus. When the Romans conquered Syria (65 B.C.) they rebuilt, and endowed with certain privileges, these "ten cities," and the province connected with them they called "Decapolis."

**Resources:** Why did Jesus Perform Miracles? Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers. Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, Revised In Accordance With the Official Latin Text Promulgated By Pope John Paul II, 2084; ; The Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old Testament – Deuteronomy Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M. pp. 196 -202; Liturgical Press, Collegeville Min.; The Collegeville Bible Commentary, New Testament – James – Jerome H. Neyrey, S. J., pp. 1219-1221; Liturgical Press, Collegeville Min.; The Gospel of Mark. Revised Edition Copyright (c) 1975 William Barclay First published by The Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh, Scotland First Edition, September, 1956 Second Edition, May, 1958 Published by Westminster John Knox Press Louisville, Kentucky. The Gospel of Mark, Mary Healy and Pete S. Williamson, Baker Academic Grand Rapids, Mi; pp.134-138.

This meditation is prepared by Deacon Terrel J. Broussard for personal use in Adult Faith Formation at St. Maria Goretti, St. Joan of Arc, St. Augustine and St. Peter Claver Parishes in New Orleans, La. ©2018