

# 23<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## St. Mark 7:31-37

Our Lord never made those who could hear deaf or those who could speak mute, not even those who listened to evil and spoke treachery. Instead, He opened the ears of the deaf to hear the Word of God and the mouths of the mute to proclaim God's work. This is how God fights evil—not by destroying His enemies but by enabling His faithful. So when we ask why does God allow evil we should look to ourselves who at our Baptism the Priest prayed *Ephphatha*: “be opened [for] the Lord Jesus made the deaf here and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive His word, and your mouth to proclaim His faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father” (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, n. 101). This is God's vengeance, as the prophet Isaiah spoke of in the first reading—“He will come and save you... the ears of the deaf [shall be] unstopped... and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy” (*Is.* 35:4-6). He raises the voices of His faithful against the shouts of His enemies, and He opens the ears of His people to His word—and remember that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary conceived because she listened to the voice of God through the Archangel Gabriel—and she said, “Let it be done according to your word” (*Lk.* 1:38).

Our Lord's healing by His touch and by His words are a precursor to the Sacraments of the Church, whose Priests administer the invisible grace of God by visible signs and by audible words. Each Sacrament demands that which is physical as well as that which is spiritual—both touch and prayer—because our healing or our redemption is of our whole person, physical and spiritual. This is the new creation of God, the rebirth of the world and of humanity, the breaking-in of God into our sin and our frailty to encourage us, to raise us and to perfect us so that in spite of our inclination to sin we have the power to re-

orient ourselves to holiness.

The demands of being a Catholic are demands to give hope where no hope is left, to open up the eyes of the despairing to the possibilities revealed in Christ, to show them that there is always another way. Often we do not have the strength to hold on to hope. But by our Baptism we began our exodus from enslavement to sin to the promise of freedom in God, but often, somewhere along the way, we feel lost in the wilderness and we cannot seem to find our way out. So we are to echo hope in Christ for those in despair, we are to remind others of the possibilities that come with grace—the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. The fault we often bear in times of despair is our hesitation to love and to profess love. Love is Christ made real here and now and all the hope and possibilities that come because of Christ's courage to love. If we make hope a reality and give rise to new possibilities then by God's grace, weak hands will be strengthened, feeble knees made firm, "the lame shall leap like a deer... [and] a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way" (*Is.* 35:6, 8).