

# **A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)**

Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle B  
Isaiah 35:4-7; James 2:1-5; Mark 7:31-37

The Old Testament reading from Isaiah beautifully supports the Gospel story. Truly understanding the message of Isaiah explains why the deaf and mute man is brought to Jesus in Mark's story. Let's begin with Isaiah and move toward the Gospel teaching.

Isaiah 35 is a message of hope for the hopeless. It speaks of a time to be anticipated after the Exile, a time when the impossible to imagine becomes fact. Let's look at the chapter in total, not just the snippet chosen for Sunday.

vv. 1-2 The desert and parched lands will become like Sharon, a region that was known for its fertility and lush pasture land. This fertility was seen as a sign of God's approval. (Mary has been called the Rose of Sharon.) Carmel was also known for its lush tree cover. Isaiah writes that the glory of Lebanon (rich in cedars) and the splendor of Carmel and Sharon will be given to the desert.

vv. 3-4 Feeble hands and feet will become strong and firm for God is coming to save his people.

vv. 5-6 The eyes of those who are blind will see again. Ears of the deaf will hear again. The silent tongues will sing again.

vv. 7-8 Burning sands and thirsty ground will spring forth water. The ruins and deserts where jackals live will become marshlands. A highway will appear in the wilderness and only holy people will walk on it.

vv. 9-10 Lions will be of no threat to the redeemed who will enter Zion in great joy and gladness. Sorrow and mourning will be no more.

What an image! The impossible becomes possible! That's hope at its best. It is this kind of hope that caused the friends of the deaf man to seek out Jesus and expect a miracle. "Their amazement went beyond all bounds." In their hearts, the images of Isaiah became possible. Their deaf and mute friend could now hear and speak. No wonder they could not keep it to themselves!

Jesus could have wished the healing or just thought the healing. But he chose to perform the healing. This is important for us. Jesus took the man aside for private, personal time together. Jesus actually put his fingers into the man's ears, then he spat and touched the man's tongue. These are human acts, intimate connections, and confirmation of the integral worth of the person in need. Our Divine Master reached out to touch the need of a deaf man in very real, very human way.

I think Jesus wanted all of us to follow his example. Touching the need with our hands, our minds, our compassion, our time, and our faith in miracles are the means by which we pass on his love to each other.

The most beautiful quality of our loving actions is that even those who reject one more sermon on how to love, will experience our example through their senses.