

Father O'Connor's Homily for 5 September 2021
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

Isaiah 35: 4-7a

James 2: 1-5

Mark 7: 31-37

“You really did that well!” That is a line that we all like to hear from other people, whether on the golf course, the football field, at a staff meeting, after giving a presentation at school or having made a very special dinner at home. “You really did that well!”

And that is what people were saying about Jesus in today's Gospel after He cured a man who could not hear or speak plainly: “He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Today's Gospel contains a very tender scene. It shows us how considerate Jesus was of a person's feelings. You and I have feelings. We know how painful it is to have our feelings hurt. This Gospel reminds us that everyone else has feelings too.

There was a man who could not hear and could not speak plainly. Jesus came along and the crowd begged Jesus to lay His hand on the man right then and there and cure him. But notice the manner in which Jesus did this.

The Gospel says that Jesus took the man “off by himself, away from the crowd.” Why? Well, the crowd was very noisy and excited, and they were probably gesturing wildly. But the deaf man could not hear them. He may have thought they were all talking about him.

Jesus knew that this man had a special need and Jesus did not want him to be embarrassed. So He took the man “off by himself, away from the crowd.” Jesus showed the most tender consideration for the feelings of a man for whom life was very difficult.

Then Jesus makes clear to the man what He was about to do for him. How? The Gospel says that Jesus “put His finger into the man's ears” to let him know, “I am going to heal your deafness so that you will be able to hear.”

And then “spitting, He touched his tongue.” Now you are probably thinking, “How gross!” But may I remind you that in the ancient world, saliva was thought to be healing. And we even recognize that today. What did grandma do when she burned her finger in the kitchen? She may have

touched her burnt finger to her tongue, right? Jesus wanted to demonstrate that He was going to heal his speech.

Then Jesus “looked up to heaven” to let the man know that this was something that God was doing for him. And Jesus said to him, “Ephphatha!” – which means, “Be opened!” And the man could now hear and could speak plainly. He was cured.

Now Jesus could have performed this miracle in front of the crowd. And He could have done it very quickly. But His whole manner shows us most vividly that Jesus did not consider this man to be a mere **case**. Jesus considered him to be **an individual** worthy of dignity and respect. The man had a special need. And with the most tender consideration Jesus took him away by himself and ministered to him in a way that spared his feelings and in a way that he could understand.

And so the crowd rightly remarked, “He has done all things well.”

Jesus is teaching us how we are to treat other people. We can do what is actually “a good deed” for someone else, but we can spoil it if we rush through it or treat the person as though they were a bother and did not deserve our time and attention. But we can also turn a small good deed into something much larger if we offer it in a way that shows our personal consideration for the person receiving it.

When Jesus finished this healing, the people declared that He had “done all things well.” This sounds a lot like the verdict of God at the end of the sixth day of creation, when God “looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good” [Genesis 1: 31]. Then the sin of Adam and Eve spoiled it all. And now Jesus was restoring the beauty of God’s creation to this fractured world.

So the crowd rightly remarked, “He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” Indeed, “He has done all things well.”

Jesus teaches us by His own example how to compound the goodness of what we do by not just “getting it done,” but by making that extra personal effort to “really do it well,” in His Name.