



GOD'S WORD THIS MONTH

SEPTEMBER

06

23RD SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

EPHPHATA: BE OPENED

Mark tells the story of how a man's speech and hearing are restored briskly, but with some unusual details. Jesus touches the man's tongue with saliva. Only in one other miracle story,

the cure of a blind man, does Jesus use a natural substance (mud), for his miracle are usually worked by a word of command or by a healing touch. The word of command, *ephpata*, has been preserved in the original language of Jesus, Aramaic, but it was also translated into Greek, the original language of the Gospel. It is still used during the rite of baptism. Another unusual word is used to describe Jesus' prayer: "looking up to heaven, he sighed." That word could also be translated as "groaned." It is intended to convey something of the intensity of the prayer of Jesus, as a moment of deep communication with God. The cure is immediate. Despite the command not to make the cure known, the more widely the news is broadcast. The healing activity of Jesus was one of the signs by which he was recognised as the messiah. When John the Baptist sent disciples to ask Jesus whether or not he was the messiah, Jesus' answered by telling him to report what they had seen, that "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. (Mat 11:5). This was a fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah we heard in today's first reading, "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy" (Isa 35:5-6). These words are read in the first reading of today's Mass.

TODAY'S READINGS

IS.35:4-7 PS.145:7-10 JAS.2:1-5
MARK 7:31-37



SEPTEMBER

13

24TH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

It was probably embarrassing enough for the disciples to be asked by Jesus who people thought he was. It was even more embarrassing when the question got personal- "Who do you think I am?" It is easy to imagine a few moments of stunned and uncomfortable silence which is only broken when Peter blurts out: "You are the Messiah." Yes, the rest of them agreed. That is what he was and it would only be a matter of another week or so before they reached Jerusalem for Passover. Then he would declare himself publicly as the Son of David and his reign as king of Israel would begin in earnest. As part of his inner circle, life could only get better for them. But here the conversation takes a sharp turn. What lies ahead is not a throne, but a cross. It is not a cheering crowd that awaits them but a jeering one. There will be no

pleasures of the royal palace, but anguished prayer in a garden. Ever the optimist, Peter pulls him aside: that is no way to talk, he tells him, it will only frighten the others. Jesus turns on him. Peter is a tempter, a Satan. If you want to follow Jesus, you must totally forget yourself. No self-respecting human being wanted to end up on a cross. Decent people were spared the cross. It was reserved for slaves and revolutionaries. A character in a play written about two hundred years before Christ, says: "Don't threaten me. I know that the cross will be my grave. That is where all my ancestors were laid to rest – my father, and my grandfather, and my great-grandfather, and my great-great-grandfather." For a slave, the cross was a 'no hope' sign. It was the sign of death. Yet it will be the door into eternal life for the follower of Jesus.

TODAY'S READINGS

IS.50:5-9 PS.114:1-6 JAS.2:14-18
MARK 8:27-35

SEPTEMBER

20

25TH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

WELCOMING CHILDREN

Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem is a crash course in discipleship for misguided followers. As they walked along, they argued about who will be first. Jesus gives them

a lesson they are unlikely to forget. He takes a child and puts it in front of them. There was no cult of cuddly babies in Jesus' day. For poor families, a child was another mouth to feed they sometimes could ill afford. Sometimes when a baby was born, the midwife would bring it and lay it at the father's feet. If he turned away, it was a declaration that the child was unwanted and so could be exposed to die abandoned. What made both Judaism and Christianity different, was the respect they had for the fragile child, even before

its birth. It is this fragility that would-be of Jesus must learn if they wish to follow him.

A young American couple, Jenna and Dan Haley were delighted when they discovered Jenna was pregnant. They were devastated when they learned that their baby boy's brain was not forming properly and he would probably die soon after birth. They never considered abortion as an option. They named their unborn son Shane Michael and made a list of all the things they dreamed of doing as a family and decided to do them with Shane before he was born. The list included visits to the beach or the zoo, a trip to New York to see the Empire State building and the Statue of Liberty. They also brought Shane to holy places that were special for their families. Through a *Facebook* page, "Prayers for Shane," they kept friends and family informed of their progress. A month

before Shane was due, they had finished the list. Shane was born on 9 October 2014. He lived for just four hours but long enough for his extended family to gather to welcome him into the community of faith in the sacrament of baptism. "Shane spent his entire life in the arms of people that loved him unconditionally," his parents wrote, "and I don't think you could ask for a more beautiful life than that. He is home now with the Lord and he will forever be our little miracle!"

TODAY'S READINGS

Wis.2:12,17-20 Ps.53:3-6 Jas.3:16-4:3
MARK 9:30-37



GOD'S WORD THIS MONTH

continued from page 45

SEPTEMBER

27

26TH SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME



COLD WATER AND MILLSTONES

Today's Gospel has two distinct parts. The first attempts to answer the question: "Who is on our side?" The other is about how disciples can be obstacles to the mission. Probably like the other disciples, John wanted to retain the monopoly on the power that came from being a disciple. He probably expected Jesus to congratulate him for defending the territory against amateurs who were attempting to cast out devils by using his name. Jesus' answer is very clear: if a person is not preventing the mission from happening, then they should be considered as being on Jesus' side. A cup of cold water is a small thing, but on a hot day in Palestine, it was a welcome gift that offered an opportunity for rest and conversation.

The second part is uncompromising. It considers first of all the case of a disciple who proves to be a cause of stumbling to "little ones" – children or fragile people with few resources. The second part is made up of a series of potential causes of offence – hand, foot or eye. We must be careful here to realise that Jesus is exaggerating to make a point. We have no right to drown an opponent or to cut off a hand or foot or pluck out an eye. That would be murder or mutilation of the body which is gift of God and over which we do not have total control. The strength of the language however is intended to make it clear to us just how careful we need to be in respecting the rights of vulnerable people. It is a strong reminder to the Church about how vigilant it must be to prevent the physical or sexual abuse of children.

TODAY'S READINGS

NUM.11:25-29 PS.18:8,10,12-14 JAS.5:1-6 MARK 9:38-43,47-48