

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

September 5, 2021

Isaiah 35:4–7a • James 2:1–5 • Mark 7:31–37

I.

Over time,
we notice details that, at first, escape our attention.

I was pastor of Sacred Heart parish in Danville from 2011 to 2014.

I remember the day I noticed the inscription on the tabernacle there:
SALUS.

Salus is a Latin word with several meanings:
“health,” “welfare”—and, “salvation.”

It’s very interesting that early Christians used the word “health”
to describe God’s action,
his rescuing humanity from the power of sin.

II.

In preparation for his passion, death, and resurrection,
Christ conducted a public ministry over the course of two or three years,
which included healing—restoring people to health.

That *salus* was a sign and a preparation for even greater *salus*:
the salvation he would achieve by dying on the Cross
and by rising from the dead.

Jesus’ public ministry,
which is narrated in the Gospels during Ordinary Time,
is meant to be understood in light of the paschal mystery:
his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension.

Likewise, our understanding of healing—*salus*—
is to be shaped by both the public ministry and the paschal mystery of Christ.

III.

In today's Gospel,
Christ performs a double miracle.

He heals a foreigner who is both deaf and who has a speech impediment:

“He put his finger into the man's ears
and, spitting, touched his tongue;
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.”

This man's physical *salus* is restored,
but that's not the end of the story.

The evangelist tells us that Jesus “ordered them not to tell anyone.”

That seems odd.

Why would Christ want to keep this healing a secret?

Wouldn't it be better for everyone to spread the news
about what Christ was doing?

The reason for secrecy is the passion,
which is the climax of Mark's Gospel and all the Gospels.

In the Gospel of Mark,
the theme of secrecy runs throughout the text.

It's a literary device meant to alert the reader
that Jesus' full identity will remain a secret until his death.

In other words,
without the Cross, Christ will be misunderstood.

This also means that the restoration of physical *salus*
points to the *salus* of the Cross.

That's important for us,
who know about the Cross and believe in its power.

We live in the period after Jesus' public ministry.

It's impossible for us to encounter the earthly Jesus,
as people did during his public ministry.

We relate to Christ in a different—and more excellent—way:
we know him through his paschal mystery.

Jesus no longer walks the earth.

Now he is in heaven:
“at the right hand of the Father,”
as we profess in the Creed.

This doesn't mean that Christ is absent—far from it.

Instead, Christ is now present in the Church, which is his Body,
especially when the Church celebrates the Mass:
in the assembly of believers;
in the person of the priest;
in the proclamation of the Scriptures;
and especially in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist.

That's where we find Christ,
and that's where he heals us,
restoring our *salus*.

To be sure, there can be physical healings nowadays.

But more typically, there is a broader kind of healing.

This is because salvation—ultimate *salus*—heals the entire person:
body, soul, mind, and heart.

We can experience that salvation now,
even as it awaits ultimate fulfillment.

Christ's healing today helps people achieve freedom from vice and addiction.

Christ's healing today helps people forgive others and be reconciled to them.

Christ's healing today helps people think beyond themselves,
and serve those in need.

Christ's healing today emboldens people to give witness to their faith,
and to talk about it with others.

IV.

An encouragement:

let's ask Christ to heal some aspect of our life.

We can take our inspiration from those who assisted the deaf-mute man:

“People brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment
and begged him to lay his hand on him.”

That courageous act invited Jesus to restore the man to health.

Salus: health and salvation.

Christ can restore us.

He heals us—and saves us.