

FATHER MARK SCHULTE HOMILY
Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
September 5, 2021
“The Holy Spirit Is at Work All Around Us”

When we are faced with many challenges in our world whether cultural, political, or even in the Church herself at times, one could get the impression that the world is kind of falling apart around us.

These kinds of challenges existed even during Jesus’ time. The challenges then perhaps took different forms but for the people of that day they were just as intense.

In the readings, especially the first reading with Isaiah – and then the Gospel, which is related to it, we can see that God is very active among His people, bringing them hope and joy. Isaiah prophesies that when God (as the Messiah) comes among His people great transformations will take place: Those who are frightened will be encouraged, those who are afflicted with maladies and sicknesses of various kinds will be cured. The blind will receive sight, the deaf will hear, and the lame will walk. Even creation itself will be restored. Harsh landscapes will become like paradise with an abundance of water. (Is 35:4-7)

The Gospel passage is meant to be a kind of fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy. Jesus as the Messiah is restoring speech and hearing to a man who had neither. And he does it in such a way that brings amazement to the people. (Mk 7:31-37)

Later on, in the Gospel of Matthew, John will send his emissary to Jesus to ask Him if he was the one that they should be looking for in other words; is He the Messiah? Jesus said, “tell John what you see: the blind see, the deaf hear, cripples walk, dead men are raised to life.” Again, only the Messiah, Son of God, can do these things – therefore, know for certain that I am He – and I am among you. (Jn 11:2-6)

All of these wonderful events which are brought about in our physical world are meant to have a deeper spiritual meaning. In Isaiah, the abundance of water restoring a parched landscape is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing about a new creation, a creation that was damaged by the sin of man.

Our Lord restoring hearing and speech to the man is a sign of the restoration of our ability to hear and speak the word of God. The Church uses these very actions and words in Her sacramental rites. In the sacrament of Baptism, the child’s lips and ears are touched symbolizing hearing and speaking the Gospel message as a child of God.

Spiritual renewal is happening all around us, and if we are open to the Holy Spirit we participate in this renewal; a renewal in our personal lives and in the lives of other people.

Some people only focus on problems in the world – but the true believer can see through the eyes of the Holy Spirit and see that God is performing spiritual miracles all around us. Allow Jesus to open “*Ephatha*” your mind and heart so that you see His wonderful works and sing His praises.

“Lord open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise!” (Ps 51)