

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus healed a deaf man with a speech impediment. When we hear the miracle stories in the Gospels, we might be tempted to think that they represent random acts of kindness on the part of Jesus. Nothing could be further from the truth. The miracles of Jesus were far more than random acts of kindness. They fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of God's kingdom.

According to the Prophet Isaiah, the signs of God's coming will be that the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be cleared, the lame will leap, and the tongues of those unable to speak will sing. Jesus healing the deaf man with the speech impediment was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah and, therefore, a sign that Jesus was inaugurating the kingdom of God on earth at least in a beginning sort of way.

One could argue that we live in frightening times. In 2014, Indianapolis was in the top ten cities for murders committed. This year has also been a violent year on the streets of Indianapolis. Our national economy remains stagnant. During the past year, we have seen increasing racial tensions in the United States. ISIS or ISIL continues to kill and destroy almost at will. Christians are victims of persecution in many parts of the world.

Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind God's words to Isaiah: "*Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God, he comes with vindication; With divine recompense he comes to save you.*" These are words of hope. The miracle in today's Gospel is a sign of hope. God's kingdom is in our midst through the presence of Jesus within and among us. If we believe in the power of Jesus' resurrection, we have to believe that God's kingdom will prevail despite the chaos in the world.

At the same time, please note that Jesus healed the deaf man with the speech impediment by putting his finger into the man's ears and touching his tongue. Touch was an important element in the healing encounter between Jesus and the deaf man. We all know how important and life giving physical touch can be, for example, when we hug friends and family. I would suggest that this should challenge us to look at how we communicate with others. Do texts, tweets, Facebook, and e-mails have the same value in relationships as talking or face-to-face interaction? Are we missing or even losing something by the ways we are communicating today?

Let me give you a couple of examples. When a college financial aid officer was meeting with a parent and prospective student, a younger sibling was sitting next to his mother. In the midst of the meeting, the younger sibling texted his mother to ask to go outside to the car. The same financial aid officer told me that some of those requesting aid would not return his telephone calls, but if he texted them, they would reply immediately. A young job applicant did not get a job because she failed to return a telephone call from the person who was going to offer her a job.

My brothers and sisters, in today's second reading, St. James told his readers to show no partiality. His example suggests that even at the Eucharist, the community was valuing and therefore treating the rich and the poor very differently. He suggested that those distinctions were not God's distinctions: "*Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?*" The question we must ask ourselves is whether we value and treat people differently based on distinctions that God would not make.