

We hear Isaiah declare: “*Be strong, fear not! Here is your God...the eyes of the blind (will) be opened, the ears of the deaf (will) be cleared...the tongue of the mute will sing...*”

With this in mind, I was reading something this week that spoke of how the sciences of our age and even artificial intelligence still have difficulty explaining sight and hearing. It described how *robots can be equipped with sensors to detect sound and light and react in various ways to audio and visual stimuli. But a robot cannot “see” or “hear” in the way that a human person does. A robot cannot create the visual field that each of us “sees” when we open our eyes. A robot can sense the frequencies of sound but cannot feel the harmonies of Mozart or experience the sensations of music as they touch our hearts. True sight and hearing are experiences of consciousness, and a robot is not truly conscious. When God breathed into Adam the “breath of life” (Gen 2:7) and gave him the gift of consciousness, light and sound came into being for the first man, mysterious gifts of the creator God.*¹

As Isaiah declared that there would come a time when “*the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared...the tongue of the mute will sing...*”, we realize that this promise is fulfilled in and through Jesus. Through him, ears that could not begin to hear opened at his command.

Think about it: When the Creator commands anything, creation obeys. At creation, nonbeing obeyed and it gave way to being; darkness obeyed and it gave way to light; chaos obeyed and it gave way to order. When the Creator utters a command, a response of obedience follows...with one exception. That exception is human free will. As we all know, we have the ability to defy what God calls us to. That’s why it is a far greater thing for God to make Saints out of sinners than for God to make the entire universe from nothing. Nothingness has no power to resist his command, but we do.²

In the Gospel, we hear the encounter of Jesus and a deaf man who suffers with a speech impediment, and Saint Mark describes it vividly. He doesn’t just tell us that Jesus healed the man, but that he stuck fingers in his ears, that he spit, that he touched his tongue, that Jesus craned his head heavenward and groaned the Aramaic word “*Ephphatha*”.

This encounter, this healing echoes the account of God creating Adam. For the deaf man, the universe is silent, and it could be said that, unlike Adam, he is only “partially created”. But Jesus laid hands on him and used spittle to complete the man’s creation. These gestures recall how God formed Adam with his own hands, after spitting on the dust of the earth to make moldable clay.³

To be clear, the point of Jesus physical healings was not to put doctors out of business.⁴ Further, the healing miracles themselves were not the primary point of Jesus’ mission. It’s been suggested, and I believe, that his primary task was to heal us *spiritually*, not *physically*. That’s why in these healing miracles he usually commands that the healed person tell no one about it. Jesus knew that the spectacle of physical healing would be a distraction to what he regarded as most important—spiritual healing.

If physical healing was not his main purpose, then why does Jesus perform physical healings at all? I’ve heard it suggested that it’s because we tend to be oblivious, and without the spectacle of these physical signs, we might never see Jesus for who he is—his true identity as God among us—nor grasp his primary objective. Miracles call us to attention.

¹ Bergsma, John. *The Word of the Lord: Reflections on the Sunday Mass Readings for Year B*. Emmaus Road Publishing. Kindle Edition.

² Kreeft, Peter. *Food for the Soul: Reflections on the Mass Readings (Cycle B)*. Word on Fire. Kindle Edition.

³ Ibid (Bergsma)

⁴ Ibid (Kreeft)

Maybe it can fairly be said that when this Gospel speaks about the “deaf hearing,” it refers to us, at times so spiritually deaf that despite showing up to Mass, by the time we’re back home, we can’t begin tell you what we heard, what God wanted to say to us.

Perhaps likewise, when it references the “mute speaking”, it also points to us, who cannot think of a single thing to say to our neighbor or coworker about what’s meaningful about Jesus Christ and the Church he established.⁵

In any way this is true, we don’t despair or become discouraged. Instead, it should enliven us and remind us of our need for the spiritual wet-willie Jesus gave the deaf man. Let us pray that Jesus will remove our spiritual earplugs and our stopped-up mouths; to truly hear what’s proclaimed in this Mass, to speak of Jesus with power and meaning to those around us, and that in our human freedom, we would respond in obedience to our Creator. Close your eyes and imagine Jesus standing before you, looking into your eyes, looking deep within you. “*Ephphatha*”, he says.

⁵ Ibid (Bergsma)