

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God.  
He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.  
He will come and save you.”  
Then 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.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;  
the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

A reading from the letter of Saint James.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

My brothers and sisters,  
do you with your acts of favouritism  
really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?  
For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothes  
comes into your assembly,  
and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in,  
and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say,  
“Have a seat here, please,”  
while to the one who is poor you say,  
“Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,”  
have you not made distinctions among yourselves,  
and become judges with evil thoughts?  
Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.  
Has not God chosen the poor in the world  
to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom  
that he has promised to those who love him?



Pause for **THREE** seconds  
then look up at the people  
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – 23 B

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

Returning from the region of Tyre,  
Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee,  
in the region of the Decapolis.  
They brought to him a deaf man  
who had an impediment in his speech;  
and they begged him to lay his hand on him.  
He took him aside in private, away from the crowd,  
and put his fingers into his ears,  
and he spat and touched his tongue.  
Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him,  
“Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”  
And immediately the man’s ears were opened,  
his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.  
Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one;  
but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.  
They were astounded beyond measure, saying,  
“He has done everything well;  
he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

### **Reading I: Isaiah 35:4-7a**

Although this passage occurs in the first part of Isaiah, among the prophecies of the preexilic Isaiah of Jerusalem, it breathes the spirit of Second Isaiah and, if not written by him, must be contemporary with him and from the same school. Its life situation is the impending return from exile (see especially verses 4b and 7b).

This passage was chosen for today because of verses 5 and 6, which speak of the healing miracles that will accompany the return from exile. When we remember that for Second Isaiah the return was the final redemptive act of God, we can understand how early Christianity saw this passage (like Isaiah [29:18](#) and [61:1-3](#)) as a prediction of Jesus' messianic healings.

This was clearly in the mind of Mark (or of his tradition) when he chose the highly unusual word *mogilalon* (literally: "with difficulty of speech") to describe the deaf-mute whose healing is recounted in today's gospel reading, for *mogilalon* is precisely the same Greek word used in the Septuagint for the word "dumb" in [Isaiah 35:6](#). Thus, this passage is eminently fitted for use with today's gospel.

---

### **Responsorial Psalm: 146:7, 8-9, 9-10**

Selections from this psalm are used on other occasions in the Lectionary, but particularly noteworthy is the use of the same verses on the third Sunday of Advent in series A (but with a refrain more suited to Advent) as a response to [Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10](#), which is almost the same Old Testament reading as today's.

It is a psalm of praise for the healing power of YHWH, especially for his opening of the eyes of the blind. Unfortunately, the psalm does not mention the opening of the ears of the deaf and the releasing of the tongues of the dumb, but that may be taken as implied.

---

### **Reading II: James 2:1-5**

Continuing the exhortations based on the names of the twelve patriarchs in Genesis 49 (see last Sunday), this passage is said to be based on the name Judah (= "Lord of glory"—[Genesis 49:8-12](#)). It is an exhortation to the right treatment of the poor.

Because the early Christians, for the most part, belonged to the powerless classes of the Roman Empire, the New Testament shows very little concern for social justice as compared with the Old Testament prophets.

But James' Church consists of rich and poor members, and a concern for the proper respect of the poor as persons surfaces immediately. Yet, there is no indication that the wealthy members of James' Church had any political power, and therefore there is little suggestion of a real social ethic.

The utmost that this passage suggests is that the silence of the New Testament on such matters is no indication that the gospel has no social implications. It all depends on the conditions under which the Church has to operate, and these vary greatly in time and place.

Note how James, who on the surface looks so moralistic, again bases his exhortation on the truths of the Gospel: wealthier Christians should show concern for the poorer members because (in baptism) God has chosen the poor to inherit the kingdom.

---

### **Gospel: Mark 7:31-37**

This is one of the two miracle stories peculiar to Mark (the other is the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida in [Mark 8:22-23](#)). Both stories represent our Lord as employing a physical healing technique, and perhaps for that reason did not appeal to the later evangelists, who preferred to depict him as healing solely through a word.

Like so many other gospel pericopes, this story seems to have passed through a number of successive stages:

1. An original exorcism by Jesus (its exorcistic character is suggested by the words “his tongue was released”).
2. The Palestinian Church, which interpreted Jesus in terms of the eschatological prophet-servant, wrote up the story as a fulfillment of [Isaiah 35](#).
3. The Hellenistic Church, which interpreted Jesus in terms of the wonder-worker or divine man, preserved the foreign word “Ephphatha,” thus creating an impression of the wonder-worker’s mysterious power and emphasizing the physical means of healing (putting his fingers into the man’s ears, spitting, and touching his tongue).
4. The evangelist gives a fresh meaning to the story by the place where he locates it in his continuous narrative. It symbolizes what is happening to the disciples (see [Mark 8:22-26](#)). They have been deaf to Jesus’ word ([7:18a](#)) and are as yet unable to make any confession of faith in him. Eventually, however, at Caesarea Philippi, it will begin to dawn on them who Jesus really is, and Peter will make his confession of faith. Thus, the ears of the disciples will be opened, their tongues will be released, and they will speak plainly, declaring through their spokesman Peter, “You are the Messiah” (see next Sunday’s gospel).

Reginald H. Fuller